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Film
QUARTERLY

VOLUME XLII, NUMBER 3
SPRING 1989

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FILM QUARTERLY (ISSN 0015-1386) is published quarterly at the subscription prices given below by the University of California Press, Berkeley, California 94720. Second-class postage paid at Berkeley, California, and at additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to **Film Quarterly**, University of California Press, Berkeley CA 94720. $3.50 per copy, $14.00 per year for individuals; $28.00 per year for institutions. Subscribers outside USA add $3.00 for postage. Domestic claims for nonreceipt of issues should be made within 90 days of the month of publication, overseas claims within 180 days. Thereafter, the regular back issue rate will be charged for replacement. Overseas delivery is not guaranteed. Back issues available at $5.00. Editor: Ernest Callenbach. Assistant to the Editor: Bonnie Dehler. New York Editor: William Johnson. Los Angeles Editor: Michael Dempsey. Boston Editor: Randall Conrad. London Editor: Colin Young. Rome Editor: Gideon Bachmann. Advisory Editorial Board: Leo Braudy, Andries Deinum, John Fell, Brian Henderson, Albert Johnson, Marsha Kinder, Neal Oxenhandler. Views expressed in signed articles are those of the authors. Indexed in **Art Index, Book Review Index, Film Literature Index, Humanities Index, International Index to Film Periodicals, Monthly Cumulating Periodical Index,** and **Popular Periodical Index.** Printed in U.S.A. Type: Freedmen's Organization, Los Angeles. Printing: Malloy Lithographing. © 1989 by the Regents of the University of California. Back issues subsequent to Volume 18 (1965-1966) can be obtained from the University of California Press.

MICHAEL DEMPSEY

Quatsi Means Life:

The Films of Godfrey Reggio

In 1983, a previously unknown film-maker, Godfrey Reggio, materialized with *Koyaanisquatsi,* and more than its title proved to be unusual.

For one thing, Reggio not only had no experience making movies, he seldom saw any. A Louisianan of part-Cajun extraction, Reggio as a teenager joined a Roman Catholic teaching order, the Christian Brothers:

> I lived in the Middle Ages . . . I was in a very strict, ascetic community and was practicing asceticism at 14. It made a tremendous impression on me. It also made me very crazy, because . . . [the monks] were basically Calvinists, actually believed that the body was evil . . . I had to have my head shaved, and I lived a very strict life of silence and manual labor and study from the age of 14 till 23; then I was more out in the world but still with vows and a member of the community . . . I took it all very seriously. I wanted to be a saint, like you're supposed to want to be . . . I collected holy cards, not baseball cards.[1]

Then came eight years largely devoted to social work with street gangs in the American Southwest and, during the early 1970s, the start of his association with the Institute of Regional Education in Santa Fe, New Mexico—"basically a social, political collective . . . not ideologically based, because there are many different points of view in it, made up of political activists, researchers, artists, lawyers, a CPA, some drama people."

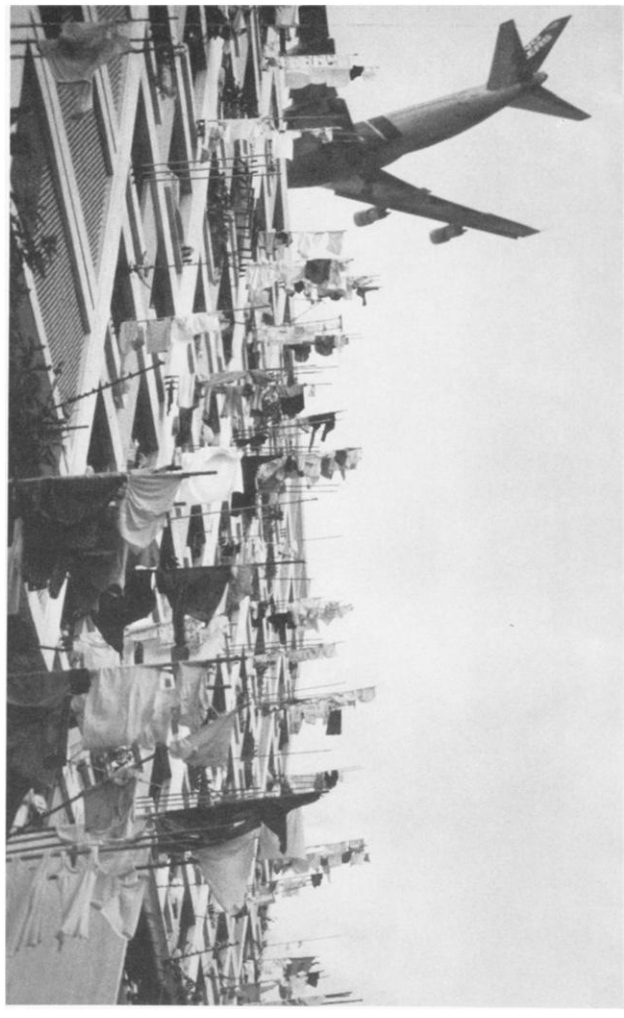
Reggio told me that it was Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados*—whose portrait of lower-depths urban youth has lost none of its simultaneously scouring and dreamlike potency today—that made him turn to film. Yet he didn't turn to filmic storytelling even of the non-mainstream kind practiced by Buñuel. Instead, he sought to reach the general public with a feature documentary that completely eliminated plot, characters, dialogue, and narration—replacing them with a series of musically accompanied "beautiful" or "striking" images. For *Koyaanisquatsi* turned out to be a feature-length montage juxtaposing the pristine beauty of unspoiled nature with the more ambiguous "terrible" beauty of humanity and its creations. Scored by the rhythmic and choral pulsations—the lofting musical "weather"[2]—of composer Philip Glass,[3] *Koyaanisquatsi* begins with a slipstream of landscape images all but hallucinatory in their pellucid, unpopulated clarity, viewed as if from an era predating even the dinosaurs. Then comes a cascade of pollution, freneticness, and soul-annihilating regimentation inflicted on the planet in the name of civilization, progress, and modernity. Reggio and his collaborators portray Earth as a living creature slowly being poisoned by its perversely suicidal passengers—as if in imitation of the scorpion that stings the frog carrying it across the river in Orson Welles's *Mr. Arkadin.* The only words of "explanation" the film offers are a translation of its title: "Ko.yaa.nis.quatsi (from the Hopi language) 1. Crazy life. 2. Life in turmoil. 3. Life out of balance. 4. Life disintegrating. 5. A state of life that calls for another way of living."

Avant-garde and underground film-makers have long used images and music in comparable ways, but their works have not been feature films for general release. According to Reggio, *Koyaanisquatsi* itself was originally thought to be unreleasable, but the enthusiasm of Francis Ford Coppola, who saw the film during its post-production period and lent his name to it as "presenter," helped it to get the wider distribution that led to its surprising critical and commercial success (including a prosperous career on video). Some found the picture simplistic, preachy, and condescending.[4] But many critics and audiences were moved by its environmental clarion call,[5] and it also reportedly became a belated "head movie" for people, from unreconstructed hippies to New Agers, who like blissing out to lulling music and pretty pictures and don't care about "meaning."

When *Koyaanisquatsi* came out, Reggio said that he had no ambitions for a movie-making career (he told me that he has turned down all

of the offers he has since received to do other features as well as MTV music videos). But the response that the film aroused engendered in him a desire to continue film-making, and in 1988 *Powaqquatsi* arrived—Part Two of a projected trilogy. Its format is similar to that of *Koyaanisquatsi* yet different. Instead of concentrating on the United States, it roams the world, especially the Third World. Instead of using unpopulated nature as its image of Eden, it highlights equally paradisiacal images that are thronged with people. Instead of a jeremiad, it offers a meditation, both elated and sorrowful. But for *Powaqquatsi,* the critical climate was largely hostile,[6] and the picture vanished from theaters last year after a brief run. *Koyaanisquatsi* may have benefitted during its theatrical run from lingering nostalgia for what were perceived as outdated but still appealing hippie ideals of "getting back to nature." But (despite a recent flurry of commercialized nostalgia for the sixties), "hippie" is generally an even more contemptuous putdown nowadays than its derivative opposite, "yuppie." Thus, despite renewed alarm over the greenhouse effect, which has made environmentalism fashionable again, with *Powaqquatsi,* Reggio was perceived as a barbarically yawping bard intent on handing us wised-up denizens of the tragically hip eighties a message we find "trite," "banal," a "cliche" because we already "know" all that.

As a result, brief verbal statements (both pro and con) have more or less replaced close examination of the diverse sights and sounds that make up *Koyaanisquatsi* and *Powaqquatsi.* But, however, one takes them, these films represent brave forays into territory no one else is exploring now; their enterprise, achievements, ambiguities, and outright confusions deserve study—with words.



Reggio's POWAQQUATSI

Koyaanisquatsi—Earth Entranced, Earth Defiled

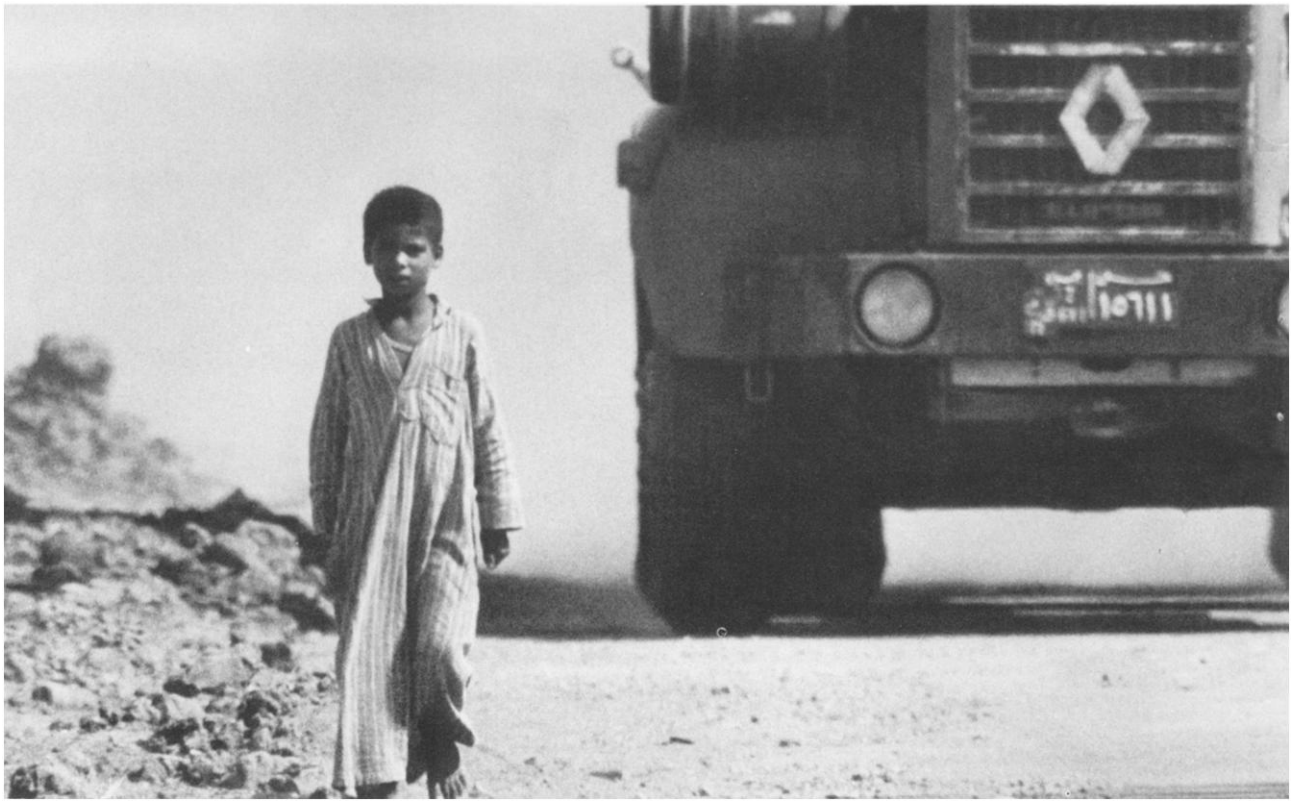
The opening half-hour or so of *Koyaanisquatsi* focuses on pure wilderness. Reggio told me that he wanted "to show the earth unrelated to man, having its own grandeur, having its own consciousness." Accordingly, the camera passes fluidly down and around rock faces and caves of the American West, contemplating and glorifying vastness, vistas of plains and mesas, clear air, untrammeled space (much of it in "John Ford's" Monument Valley but with no sense of homage). Lordly crane shots, alluringly smooth straight-ahead flyovers, and majestic pans capture nuances of unfiltered sunlight, billowing dunes, tumbling cloud mounds, oceanic surges, the boiling crests of waterfalls, untouched mountain crags. Even the most hard-bitten urbanites watching these images and hearing Glass's rhythmic pulsations (which, as they so often do, send out idealistic vibrations) probably find it all but impossible not to trance out. The sights, the music, and the film's organization of them saturate viewers in a fantasy of peace eternal; the horizon-to-horizon clarity of the shots evokes a lost, virgin realm not yet touched by the "complications" of humanity, its ideas, its desires, its conflicts, its evils, its ideologies. This vision is not exactly ecological, for these images contain not only no people but also (a few birds apart) no animals. It is almost as though we are seeing not Earth or even a stylized view of primeval Earth but another planet

altogether. This perspective, both awestruck and cosmically remote, raises knotty questions. Nevertheless, this part of the film has a grandeur that precedes and survives all misgivings.

When humanity does appear at last, the peaceable kingdom of *Koyaanisquatsi* vanishes instantly, as Reggio abruptly cuts to a brute of a truck spewing smoke in the desert and Glass's music turns premonitory. At first, the truck seems to be moving under its own power, as though the inhabitants of this alien planet are robots. Then we see the human driver while the truck's own smokespew engulfs them both and, as an early viewer of the movie said, "Oh, oh, here come the bad guys."[7] Reggio makes no bones about this being his precise intention: "I felt it would be important to be searing, to be as impactful as possible, to draw the distinctions as articulately as possible even to the point of caricature." This proves to be the nub of the film's aesthetic problem: "impactful" vs. "heavy-handed," all stemming from its adoption of a character's slogan in *Zabriskie Point:* "No Words."

As the film views it, the demon in the garden is the human lust for technology—especially in the form of that megaconglomeration of machines and mobs, the modern super-city. But before heading there, Reggio provides a tour of technology in the wilderness: electric towers, a three-stack factory desert complex with daunting smoke plumes, the blue artificial ponds of a tank farm, the overweening mass of a mighty dam. This passage yields at least one classic: a tilt up from what first look like sunbathers at a beach that then discloses a nuclear power plant in the background. Next the film proceeds to such high-tech icons as an auto assembly line featuring a chaos of cars in the making and spastic-looking workers, an automatic counter speedily totalling stacks of folding money, and an automated circuit-board plant. The film's presentation of these phenomena is certainly disapproving. Although he cites a book by philosopher-sociologist Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society,* as one of his primary influences for its ideas about the politics of tools and how to choose the right tools for a given situation (film-making included), Reggio is also something of a Luddite, viewing all tools, especially high-technology ones, with suspicion. Certainly, he has a gift for teasing out the malevolence that most everyone fears lies at the heart of technology. A particularly eerie example is his treatment of something so simple as two taxiing jet airliners. He begins with a slow-motion medium shot of the first plane's approaching snout made ripply by heat waves,

POWAQQUATSI



Human labor in slow motion: POWAQQUATSI

holds it for around 30 seconds as it closes in and turns aside; then another plane, gigantic, insectoid, gradually fills the screen, its windows like gaping eye sockets. Soon the bulky plane seems on the verge of pushing through the screen and right into the audience, an amusing approximation of 3-D in a two-dimensional image.

"Amusing" is indeed the proper word, because Reggio's sensibility also has a tempering comic side. His frenetic assembly lines—pixillated car bodies flying down the line, workers leaping back and forth like speed freaks, machinery cranking out everything from hotdogs to widgets with nary a flesh-and-blood worker in sight—suggest Busby Berkeley reincarnated as an environmentalist (even an Ecotopian). Many speeded-up images of white-collar androids zipping into elevators or up and down escalators are like updated Keystone Kops. In one witty fast-motion long shot, we see streams of freeway cars on screen left and an office building on screen right with tiny office drones scurrying madly past the windows. This comedy may be nothing new in itself, but the film's high-powered use of it is a good parody of contemporary humanity's desire not just to wallow in ever-glitzier technological doodads but also to merge with them.

Cities are the film's example of the ultimate machine—its Beast from the Apocalypse. Obviously, Reggio is far from being the first to make this observation, but no one has embodied it in images so insistently and elaborately. To him, cities are machines for creating traffic, both vehicular and human; any motivation for the traffic need not be considered, for traffic is a value in itself. The examples, scored to some of Glass's quickest arpeggios, are manifold: a montage of tickets popping up as if all by themselves at a subway station entrance; a pixillated point-of-view shot of a psychotically packed freeway; a steep moving angle along some Manhattan avenues, with the camera seeming to jerk spastically while tilting towards the peaks of skyscrapers. When people appear in these images, they are frazzled pedestrians (in one image dourly humping along beneath a Col. Sanders sign emblazoned with HAVE A BARREL OF FUN) or

acres of near-comatose drivers entombed in their cars during rush hour. It's all there: the bewildering cloverleafs, the blankets of smog, the daily dance of urban death.

"It's all there"—that also suggests one of the film's persistent problems. Taken simply as moving images apart from their context, its shots certainly are "impactful," just as they would be frozen and framed as still photos or paintings. Edited and scored as they are, their impact is redoubled. Yet this very impact short-circuits itself because the editing makes them too easily readable even by the standards of "impactfulness"—or makes them look that way so insistently (also a side-effect of using techniques generally employed in avant-garde shorts in a feature), the eye-vividness of the film's images risks becoming vacuous to the brain. In other words, time and time again, no sooner do we experience a piece of "impactful" camerawork, music, and editing than some part of the mind (my mind, anyway, and other minds, too, I suspect) "translates" it into "the soullessness of high tech" or some other verbal formulation, which it then correctly labels a cliche and blames on Reggio.

Reggio tries to escape this trap by applying the same Capital-B Beauty to technological-urban horror that he lavishes on unspoiled nature. As he put it to me, "The Beast doesn't come as a baglady, it comes as a seducer, it comes bejewelled." Like so many films noirs, *Koyaanisquatsi* is often a stylized documentary on Night and the City, but for overt menace and corruption, it substitutes a darting light show. Reggio is attentive to the facades of skyscrapers at sunset or the magic hour, savoring the green-yellow-red patterns fading light splashes across the acres of glass. His use of pixillation on nocturnal traffic creates firefly showers out of headlights and taillights. Even his images of South Bronx squalor possess overt poetic melancholy. The beauty of these images (especially those shot in slow-motion to distend commonplace moments and give us an immediate experience of their cracked-open essences) seeks to quiet that part of the brain that rushes to cry "Old news!" In his view, this cry bespeaks an addiction to urban-technological horror so deep that, rather than try to kick it, we pridefully prefer an intellectual sophistication that uses words to rationalize it.

In contemporary visual culture, imagery and techniques that at first seem forever avant-garde get swiftly recycled into more commercial forms; MTV, commercials, fashion photography, Hollywood movies, video games suck up practically anything for their own usage—which usually boils down to selling products. That's another problem that bedevils Reggio's style here. Since *Koyaanisquatsi* appeared, its styles of imagery, particularly of slow motion and pixillation, have become popular in other arenas (and, though this is impossible to certify, *Koyaanisquatsi* probably had a lot to do with stimulating this popularity). Its speed-up streaks-of-light nighttime freeway traffic shots regularly appear in commercials. Its explosion imagery has been a fixture in music videos. Its point-of-view aerial shots from a flying jet bomber turn up in the processed, stupid pseudo-lyricism of *Top Gun* and *Iron Eagle*. The same "Beauty" that Reggio tried to use to express horror in other contexts peddles everything from a glamorized career as a naval jet jockey to record albums to musical instruments to trendy ways of dressing and dancing. Even Reggio-esque nature imagery slips easily into travelogues or Club Med spots. *Koyaanisquatsi*—with its recurring shots of TVs, TV footage, and video game parlors holding people catatonically in thrall—is certainly aware of this co-optation, and perhaps, as Reggio said when the issue came up, there is simply nothing he can do about it. But, inevitably or not, this cultural syndrome does push *Koyaanisquatsi* toward becoming what it decries: more fodder for the mindless beauty machine of the image industries.

Another aspect of the film's imagery also goes somewhat awry. Amid the film's anonymous, benumbed masses, individual faces jump out from time to time in close-up "portraits" (Reggio's term), which likewise bespeak anomie, isolation, death-in-life. For instance, the camera briefly frames a blank-faced woman in a limo just before an opaque window rolls up to block her from sight. Or a shirtless man, looking lonely and isolated, will be caught peering from a ratty, red-brick tenement. Or a group of gelidly cheery casino ladies in gaudy orange uniforms and marcelled beehives will pose in the middle of feverishly incandescent downtown Las Vegas. Perhaps the most disturbing of these images (perhaps the most disturbing image in the film, *period*) is a slow dolly towards a hauntingly expressionless pilot

standing before the open cowling of his jet fighter; as the camera moves in tight, his grim face seems permeated by something beyond mortality, beyond even indifference, and the darkness inside the jet's nose cone fills the screen as though threatening to swallow the universe.

A sentence like this highlights a troubling feature of the "portraits" in *Koyaanisquatsi:* the way they all but demand such stabs at possibly overwrought "interpretation," the way such interpretations insist upon translating these faces into one trite verbal formula—say, The Dehumanization of Modern Life. Thus, again, the contradiction surfaces: each of the faces is indeed vivid, but vivid in a manner that virtually compels reduction to the banal (or non-banal) words that Reggio is at such pains to avoid. Here, it seems, is the source of the accusations of exploitation and "condescension" with which some have charged *Koyaanisquatsi.*[8] Reggio reports that he asked his subjects to pose "as if they're having their portraits done." He met the women in their casino, made friends with them, secured permission from their pit boss for them to pose, directed them as stated above, and got the shot that ended up in the film. In every detail—hairstyles, uniforms, expressions—they look garish, and this garishness, by its placement in the film, seems intended as another example of contemporary dehumanization.

But images like this *and* comments like the previous sentence raise a host of disturbing matters. The editing of this image clearly expresses an unspoken assumption: every viewer will agree that these casino women look garish. This leads to the question: Can these women have had no idea of how garish they look, how readily they serve as an instant editorial not only on dehumanization but also on their own (or their employers') tacky taste in clothes, hairdos, and make-up? The answer, apparently, is no, for they seem to present themselves to the camera with enthusiasm and even pride. But contrary questions can also be asked: "Who says they look garish?" "Who says they're an instant editorial, etc.?" I do. So, I am certain, do virtually all viewers of *Koyaanisquatsi.* And so, finally, does Reggio, who presents them this way, as vivid but limited cartoons.

It's worth speculating on how we might view them in different circumstances. For instance, in *Something Wild* and *Married to the Mob,* Jonathan Demme makes comparable characters equally garish and "dehumanized" yet also affectionately shows the energy and delight that such people can also radiate—thereby giving audiences another, fresher perspective on them. By way of implicit response, Reggio has stated:

> I wanted very much to have people view the audience and—through their eyes, through their faces, through their souls—be able to make contact with the viewer, the contact being a highly personal thing. I could decide whether we would put a face in or not, but I couldn't control the emotional response to it.

The comparison is, of course, unfair; Demme was working with fictional, scripted, staged, specially lit, costumed-art-directed comic-melodramatic characters, situations, and dialogue, whereas Reggio is dealing with more or less found documentary subjects. Still, it is troubling that his portraits, though "impactful," are so unlike neutral Kuleshov Effect faces that gain diverse forms of "expressiveness" according to context.[9] In *Koyaanisquatsi,* the faces express numbness, malaise, and *nothing else*—and would do so, it appears, in any context.

Fortunately, there are two exceptions. One is a white woman looking towards the camera with an expression that isn't instantly interpretable (is she dreaming of celebrity? is she challenging the lens: do you *really* think you can see through me, fathom me, read my mind or heart?). The other is a black teenage boy the lens enlarges as if pouncing on more malaise, only to discover an almost ethereally unreadable, faraway expression. These faces forestall the total drift of the *Koyaanisquatsi* portraiture into arid schematism; they also foretell a fruitful shift in Reggio's style that emerges in *Powaqquatsi.*

Each time I've seen *Koyaanisquatsi,* I've felt that its contrast between overwhelmingly beautiful nature unpopulated by humanity and bleeding nature thronged with people embodies a half-acknowledged fascination with the notion of wiping out the human race. When I raised this point with Reggio, he answered, "I would venture to say that's a projection. That wasn't my intention." I believe him yet continue to see this sub-element in the film. To be fair, this can be viewed as a warning, not a wish, and even if on some level it is a wish, Reggio doesn't necessarily owe us any apologies—

Jonathan Swift, after all, incorporated extreme misanthropy into *Gulliver's Travels,* though he also satirized it. But intentionally or not, there is an unmistakable attraction in the film's imagery, music, and editing to a vision of Earth without people, an Earth that could then heal its wounds.

This note sounds in the film's recurring motif of explosions, fire, smoke, destruction. Factories, rockets, armaments, machinery, housing projects turned into slums all burst, shatter, burn—as if exultantly, given the way that over them Glass's music rises in pitch, with waves of chorales, and the way the camera frequently speeds over them as if in triumphant celebration of a fulfilled prophecy. These images are an adjunct to those displaying the spectrum of light on the mirrored surfaces of skyscrapers; Reggio isn't simply appreciating the light and the colors, he wants to see these behemoths humbled. His explosion imagery is sensationally effective in visualizing this fantasy. Each time we see some immense edifice topple, the film leaves us with a mesmerizing (and, given the buildings' ugly stupidity, highly entertaining) sense of how quickly these impregnable-looking structures can disappear.

Such imagery provides a brain-bypassing *feeling* for the raw experience of social failure, as when we watch an oppressively vast housing project swiftly felled by planted charges at its foundations, the immense structure sagging in on itself as puffs of smoke cannonade from its empty windows. But Reggio is not using imagery and music analytically. Rather than follow in the footsteps of, say, Dziga Vertov,[10] he wants to bypass analysis in favor of a floodingly metaphysical, emotional "overwhelm" effect. When he shows us this housing project being destroyed in a shower of Glass, a Marxist can immediately translate this imagery into one kind of verbal statement, a capitalist another, a fascist a third, and so on—and the cogency of these statements might be anything from nil to dazzling. As far as Reggio is concerned, it simply doesn't matter:

> What you give up is the specificity of one thought, one idea, unmistakably getting your point across, which people can agree of disagree with. But what you do get is the richness of an experience that can stay in the conscious and the unconscious mind and can be continually revisited and serve as a source of inspiration for the viewer.

His truth is visual, musical, rhythmic, *visceral.*

And in *Koyaanisquatsi,* at least, that truth is indeed human extinction. In the final sequence of *Koyaanisquatsi,* as voices begin to chant the only word we hear in the picture (its title), a missile tilts and blows apart, spewing debris, flame, and ash. Seen now, the image is a creepy prefiguration of the Challenger disaster, but as the camera follows one burning chunk while it tumbles against a dull blue sky, it dawns on us that this could be Earth after some equally prefigurable Apocalypse—the very nature the film beautifies incinerated along with everything else. But unlike *On the Beach,* Reggio leaves us with no "There is still time, brother." As he puts it, "In *Koyaanisquatsi,* I view the present from the point of view of the future, as if it's over with."

Powaqquatsi—Earth Enchanted, Earth Mourned

Powaqquatsi retreats from this degree of balefulness. The nature-city dichotomy of *Koyaanisquatsi* remains, but this time both worlds are always full of people. The pre-title sequence is a long montage, scored percussively by Glass, of slow-motion images showing begrimed, sweating, straining laborers carrying sacks, apparently of dirt, up the terraced slopes of a construction site. The nature of the laborers' work is unstated and unclear; instead, the sequence is a paean to limbs, sinews, Labor in the Abstract. *Powaqquatsi* has much the same "message" as *Koyaanisquatsi* about Life Out of Balance, but it is richer and more stirring because, within the basic "obviousness" of its verbalizable theme, it has found ways to be moodier, more elusive as well. Its values are religion, hand labor, craftsmanship, the possibilities of a rapprochment between nature and city, the ethnographic beauty of Third World local settlements and indigenous customs. At its best, it fosters a poetic sense of manifold forces at work in the world making people what they are—which is not at all incompatible with a wish to change the world. Whereas *Koyaanisquatsi* primarily wants to make a point, *Powaqquatsi* also wants to communicate its own being.

Approximately the first half of *Powaqquatsi* somewhat recalls visual tactics in Sergei Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico:* "Trying it slow it down [says Reggio] so that, in effect, it becomes monumentalized. In freezing a moment, you

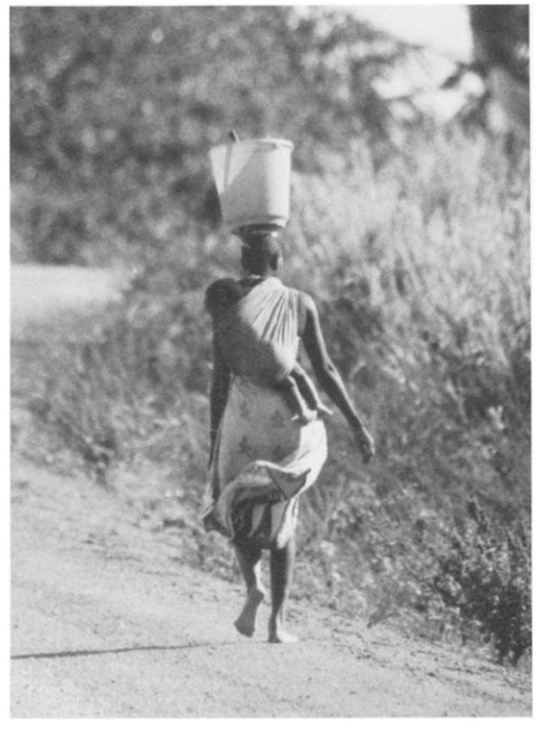
POWAQQUATSI

create a monument, and that's what we tried to do with the film, to have it become a monument of 100 minutes." Almost every image in the early sections epitomizes this goal: in particular, the camera's lingering on the billowing of a dhow's sail as sailors launch the boat; African women walking with baskets balanced on their heads, a man leading a horse through surf. These images and numerous others convey a view of human beings merged with rather than seeking to subdue nature. At the same time, as in one slow zoom-out from a patch of yellow-green terraced land, land evidently reshaped by human intervention, the new film seems willing to contemplate, as *Koyaanisquatsi* is not, the possibility that people can improve untrammeled nature. Shot in diverse Third World lands (Peru, Brazil, Israel, Kenya, India, Nigeria) as well as France and Germany, *Powaqquatsi* elides national and regional differences into a global perspective yet still conveys the diversity of customs and peoples.

The most heartening and affecting element of *Powaqquatsi* (entirely absent from *Koyaanisquatsi*) is its recurring images of children in groups. In one, boys charge the camera happily in slow motion. In another, uniformed schoolgirls walk along a city street—their free-and-easy gaits nullifying whatever regimentation might otherwise radiate from the uniforms. In still another shot (uncharacteristically sexy), the camera holds on some joggers, treating us to a quick study of t-shirt hems bouncing against pumping thighs. The film's triumph in this vein is a lengthy rightward pan over a group of kids looking directly into the lens: a frieze of faces that show a full spectrum of reactions to the camera and the camera crew they are staring at—smiles, grins, shyness, curiosity, wariness. But, unlike most faces in *Koyaanisquatsi,* these can't be *read;* instead, the film encourages us to acknowledge them, wonder at them, enjoy them. The sweet tenderness flowing in both directions between them and the camera is Reggio's most glorious achievement to date.

Shots like these display a willingness, largely absent from *Koyaanisquatsi,* to hold contradictions in suspension without resolving them. For instance, *Powaqquatsi* also contains several of Reggio's trademark images of modern skyscrapers—the most metaphorical being a steep, turning angle up two tall buildings that face each other, one glass-and-steel modern, the other rural in its stonework. If this shot appeared in *Koyaanisquatsi,* it would probably convey one tone only: hostility to the modern building. In *Powaqquatsi,* we may, if we wish, react with such hostility. Or we may detect in the shot the possibility of coexistence between the two buildings and what they represent. Similarly, as we watch a jet airliner take off past a backdrop of apartment blocks, we are allowed to notice the way its unretracted nosewheels are still spinning. A detail like this is as "interesting" or "trivial" as one cares to take it; it stands for nothing, it polemicizes about nothing, it simply exists.

POWAQQUATSI



POWAQQUATSI

Like *Koyaanisquatsi, Powaqquatsi* focuses on movement from nature to city but displays considerably more flexibility in its take on city life. In *Powaqquatsi,* as in *Koyaanisquatsi,* the cities are thronged, but the newer film is not so insistent that city dwellers are just frantic zombies. Within the hurlyburly, Reggio and his crews keep finding human peculiarities and activities (evidently brought in from the countryside) *not* hammered out of existence by urban pressures. Joyful images capture a troupe performing a dance for an appreciative crowd on a city avenue, men staging a stick-fight exhibition for some children, a parade of mummers in masks, a sea of women in yellow, violet, and saffron saris. In one astonishing shot, mourners carry a flowered coffin along a sidewalk, the bier floating above the passersby as though breasting waves. At times, *Powaqquatsi* is whimsically amused by city life. In one sideways aerial pan over some cars, they look as though they are about to slide off the screen, and Glass abets this with some airily comical themes. One magic-hour shot up a crowded beachfront to crowds and vehicles suggests a Renaissance Pleasure Faire. A nighttime tracking shot along several small businesses is content to show street life without making anti-urban points. The capper is a mini-montage that intercuts shots of Hong Kong glowing neon night life and a little girl riding in a car gazing at them out the back window. She looks quietly enraptured and peaceful and content, and so, briefly, are we, as we behold Beauty without the Beast.

As a result, when change for the worse comes, it has a more insidious, sorrowful impact. As in *Koyaanisquatsi,* The Beast God Modernity enters the World According to Reggio in the form of a machine: this time a train whipping right-to-left past a tree. Glass's music suddenly shifts to a pronounced, beat-intensive tone, after which *Powaqquatsi* reworks one of its predecessor's most hypnotic visual strategies: a flyover with the camera peering straight down canyon-walled skyscrapers to a dark city far below. Thereafter, regimentation and crowd-

ing become dominant, as soldiers start to march and apartment blocks buzz with indecipherable media noises. In fact, images of feet, which (along with images of people walking with parcels on their heads) express in the earlier sequences a hopeful note of possible surefootness in a precarious existence, now epitomize an insidiously rising, elusive, yet palpable distress that starts to permeate the film. The faces now show inchoate but unmistakeable fear, as if of some disaster no one can define but everyone senses is coming. It is here that the film makes its one explicit (if cryptic) nod to politics: a long shot of a street wall daubed with "Viva la guerra de guerrillas." But Reggio offers no specifics about this graffito, preferring to watch as a little girl, neatly dressed in a multihued frock, walks by the wall with her lunchbox, then stops to stare across the street into the lens for several moments before exiting the frame on screen right in slow motion, underscored by soft harp notes. What this girl thinks or feels (if anything) about the graffito, or about the camera that she is watching, the camera that is delivering her image to us, we never learn, but we sense the evanescence of her endangered loveliness.

The last movement of the film is a dying fall in which the specifics of human customs and behavior try to hold the line against advancing terror—visualized once as a row of ballistic missiles crawling through space. Instead of explosions, as in *Koyaanisquatsi, Powaqquatsi* uses ghostly superimpositions (with Muslim chanting on the sound track that sounds keening, ominous) of cars speeding over deserted roads and throngs hurrying along city streets as though fleeing the Last Days. In this context, the remaining quirky human elements—two men openly kissing on the mouth while standing amid a city crowd, a skinny contortionist performing dumbfounding bends and twists for an impromptu audience, a girl struggling to control a horse-drawn cart amid a crush of cars and trucks while a drunken man lolls beside her—acquire a touching fragility nowhere present in *Koyaanisquatsi.* This time there really does seem to be something other than nature to lose.

Naquöyquatsi will be Part Three of Reggio's trilogy if he can raise the funding. "Naquöy means war; quatsi means life," Reggio told me. "What the film will try to offer as a point of view is that the very foundation of civilized life

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is war. That war is the thing that motivates our society. That the military is only one part of war life. And that without war, there'd be no modernity." Glass will score it. The imagery will be around 70% stock footage reworked with editing and special effects, and Reggio will shoot the remainder himself. Right now, the foregoing verbal statement is all we have of it. It will surely be instructive to witness how, or if, the film can both elucidate and transcend it.

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2. "[Glass's] music is based on the extended repetition of brief, elegant melodic fragments that weave in and out of an aural tapestry. Listening to this music is something like watching a challenging painting that initially appears static, but seems to metamorphose slowly as one concentrates . . . One shouldn't expect Westernized musical *events*—sforzandos, sudden diminuendos—in this music; rather, the listener is immersed in a sonic weather that surrounds, twists, turns, develops." "*Satyagraha: The Sense of Peace,*" by Tim Page, in the program booklet of the CBS Masterworks recording of Glass's opera, *Satyagraha.*
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8. Jacobson, page 62: "In fact, the same portraits—of a fighter pilot, of Las Vegas casino women croupiers, of shopping mall and street corners . . . appeared as symbols that expressed Reggio's contempt and not his fascination. They had ceased to become people, just victims of an artful mugging."
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RIC GENTRY

Clint Eastwood: An Interview

Though celebrated with retrospectives at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Cinémathèque Française in Paris, the Filmmuseum in Munich, and the British Film Institute in London, Clint Eastwood is still often taken for granted as a film-maker. Perhaps a Hollywood figure of such popularity is difficult to reconcile with artistic stature for some critics, especially in the US.

Yet, a look at Eastwood's 35 major films in 24 years reveals a dramatically diverse but thematically consistent body of work. Moreover, his independent, usually rootless characters may be presented with varying degrees of aesthetic depth, but there is an undeniable seriousness and passion to someone who makes films so prolifically.

All along, Eastwood has taken risks at the box office. For every commercial project, as with the "Dirty Harry" series, there is a more personal one: *The Beguiled* (1972), *Breezy* (1973), *Bronco Billy* (1980), *Honky Tonk Man* (1982), or *Tightrope* (1984), though it should be noted that the personal and the commercial are not always easily separable. *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1975), ostensibly more of the former, was also extremely successful and, with *High Plains Drifter* (1971) and *Pale Rider* (1985),

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Clint Eastwood during the production of BIRD

comprises an Eastwood actor-director trilogy of Westerns that represent the only significant contribution to the genre since Sergio Leone (who, of course, directed Eastwood three times in the 60s) and Sam Peckinpah.

Bird is Eastwood's thirteenth film as a director and only the second in which he doesn't also appear. It's the story of jazz legend Charlie "Bird" Parker, the self-taught alto saxophonist from Kansas City whose compositions and brilliant improvisations revolutionized modern music. Much praised by his musician contemporaries, and the object of a still growing cult since his untimely death at 34 in 1955, Parker never enjoyed the popular success of his many imitators. With *Bird,* Eastwood endeavors to set the record straight.

The film is clearly a labor of love for its producer-director, a jazz aficionado and record collector since his youth. Made with a comparatively scant $9 million, *Bird* (like most of Eastwood's films) has the look of a project with at least twice the budget. New York City's 52nd Street, a block-long bazaar of jazz clubs and taverns, Harlem, Greenwich Village, and even 1940s LA are vividly created with loving detail and smoothly incorporated into the story.

Featuring Forest Whitaker (*Platoon, The Color of Money*) as Parker and Diane Venora (*Ironweed, The Cotton Club*) as Chan, Parker's romantic interest and later spouse, the structure of *Bird* (written by Joel Oliansky) is free form and associative. Beginning with Parker's final days, but then weaving forward and backward in time, *Bird* eschews chronology in favor of emotional interconnections. Like jazz itself, time is relative and fluid in the film, which runs riffs on four major themes: Parker's music, his addictions, his unstable career, and his relationship with Chan. Beautifully designed and controlled, the drama accrues power over its course of two hours and forty minutes without the least confusion of moment or place. (Readers who wish to pursue the full complexity of Bird's

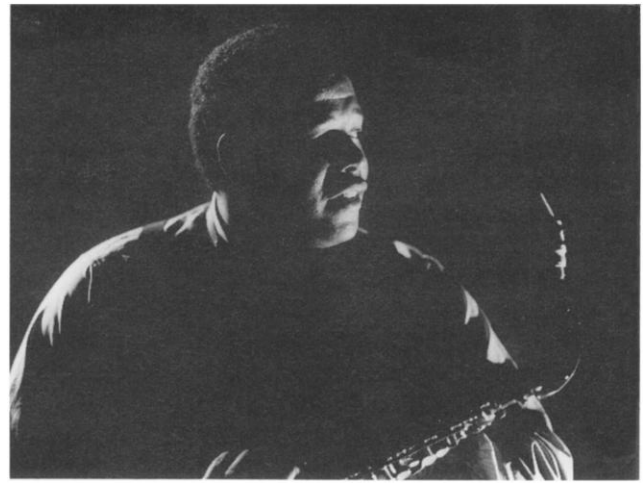
life and character could start with the chapter on him in James Lincoln Collier's *The Making of Jazz* [Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1978].)

With Whitaker, Eastwood has elicited a performance of uncommon intelligence and depth. Honored as Best Actor at the Cannes Film Festival, Whitaker conveys Parker's genius as deftly as his self-destruction. His Bird commits to his horn, his wife, and his drugs with the relaxed tenacity of someone determined to live out an inescapable fate. The entire cast is excellent, however, particularly Diane Venora as Chan, and works as a convincing ensemble.

Eastwood has always harbored two distinct notions regarding cinematography. Outdoors on location, he prefers natural light almost exclusively. Indoors, as well as at night, he prefers low light levels, partial illumination of his actors (notably himself, in past films) and large areas of darkness. With *Bird,* the only Eastwood film predominantly shot on a studio lot, he takes his second notion to new and bold extremes. Single beams of light strike the figures at oblique angles rather than full and flush. The lighting, by cinematographer and Eastwood veteran Jack Green, is at times almost abstract; Bird often appears nearly consumed by darkness, invoking both mystery and a brutal loneliness.

Some scenes use light as a metaphor or echo of the drama. When Parker first meets Chan, the lighting, against all cinematographic rules, is emphatically on her pale Caucasian face, as opposed to Parker's light-absorbing face; the effect underscores how socially unusual the romance between an "invisible" black person and a white person was at that time. When Parker learns of the death of his young daughter, Pree, the camera moves in such a way that a bulb of light behind him is suddenly eclipsed by his silhouette, as if a light were suddenly going out on his life. *Bird* abounds with such moments, using light whenever possible to convey subliminal feelings.

Eastwood's use of music, digitally processed to feature original, often previously unreleased Parker solos for a rich, contemporary theatrical sound, is further evidence of his commitment to the project. The reconstituted tracks were expensive and laborious to produce, but virtually essential in presenting the soul of such an innovative and gifted musician. (Additional music for the film was composed by Lennie Niehaus and occasional Bird harmonies were performed by Charles McPherson.) Whenever appropriate, Eastwood also uses the music for dramatic punctuation. After meeting Chan, Parker soon performs "I Can't Believe You're in Love With Me." Later, at the time of his physical collapse, the sound track includes the somber, elegant "Parker's Mood."



Charlie Parker (Forest Whitaker) in BIRD

The music also contributes to the film's implicit study of black culture in America and to its evaluation of the racial stress that, in Bird's era (and today), abetted the evolution of jazz—this country's sole original musical form. Still, Parker's own struggles with racism are understated in *Bird,* which is never preachy. Eastwood similarly downplays any lessons that might be seen in Chan, an incipient feminist who is *Bird*'s strongest, least compromising character.

Bird is not entirely new territory for Eastwood. His films have often featured jazz tracks, and aspects of Parker the protagonist recall Eastwood's own portrayals in such films as *The Gauntlet* (1977), *Honky Tonk Man* and *Heartbreak Ridge* (1986)—hard-living, self-destructive characters who were basically loners at odds with themselves or society or both.

Whether or not *Bird* is Eastwood's best directorial effort to date is arguable. *Josey Wales, Honky Tonk Man, Bronco Billy,* and *Pale Rider* are among his most outstanding. Regardless, *Bird* demonstrates how resourceful and significant a film-maker Eastwood is.

•

I understand there's an interesting story as to how you acquired the script to Bird.

Well, I first heard about it in the early eigh-

ties. Some publicity dropped out about it, that Richard Pryor was going to do it. And I thought, Oh, that's interesting, a film on Charlie Parker. Then it kind of left my mind because it looked like it was all set with Pryor at Columbia.

Then, about a year or so later, I got a chance to read the script, and I really liked it. I thought it was really unusual, really special. And I thought, I'd sure like to have this.

And then, sometime later yet, there was a property that Warner's [Eastwood's studio] had that Ray Stark at Columbia wanted very badly, called *Revenge.* There was some conversation about this and I overheard [Warner chairman] Bob Daley and [president] Terry Semel talking about how Stark wanted this *Revenge.* So I said, One moment. If they want that, and you're inclined to give it to them, why don't you hold out for this Charlie Parker story they have over there? Because from what I understand, with all the management changes that had gone on over at Columbia, Richard Pryor's no longer with the company and the status of the project is just in limbo, and I'd sure like to have it.

So they went back to Ray, and Ray went to work on it and of course, he's wondering, What's Warner's want with the property? And there were all kinds of rumors that Warner's was going to do it with Prince or something, because they didn't know yet that I was involved. Finally, they turned around and made the trade. And then when Ray found out I was doing it, he asked, Now how's Clint Eastwood going to play Charlie Parker?

Anyway, it all worked out. Ray got his project, which they're doing in Mexico right now, as a matter of fact, though I think Tri-Star is affiliated with it somehow, and I got the Charlie Parker project. That's been over two years now. I don't know how elated Warner's was about it. It wasn't a picture that featured me as an actor, just as a director. My selling point to them was that this was a little American story about a jazz artist who was very responsible in his day for great changes in music that we still hear now. And they went with it, to their credit. So I went ahead and started the film. It was a lot of work, but it was most pleasant, I must say.

And one of the first things you did was secure a lot of original, unreleased Parker music.

Yeah. Early on I began discussing it with Lennie Niehaus, who was musical director on *Bird.* Lennie's done a few other pictures with me. And Lennie said, in regards to the music for the film, How do you see doing it? Because as I understand it, Columbia's people were just going to use a sound-alike—have someone else do Charlie Parker. But I wanted to use the real thing. I thought it was important to have Charlie Parker play in the movie.

And at one point I explained this to Chan (Parker's widow), when I visited her in Paris, and she said, Yeah, I've got quite a bit of music myself. So we went over to this bank, and in the bank vault she had all these tapes, reel-to-reel tapes. And I listened to those and some of them were just great. Most of them were just Parker solos. The tape was started when Parker began to play a solo and stopped when he finished it.

So I brought these back, and through a digital process, we used some of these solos by adding new musicians and putting the music back together as it originally was. And wherever possible we brought Bird's same musicians back. Red Rodney, who played trumpet with Charlie Parker, Ray Brown on bass. In cases where the musician wasn't around anymore we brought in guys who played that kind of music real well. Lennie Tristano (piano) was replaced by either Monte Alexander or Walter Davis or Barry Harris. For Dizzy Gillespie (trumpet) we had John Faddie, who's a Dizzy protegé. Dizzy was on tour when we did the sessions so John played and he just soars up there like Dizzy.

So, ultimately, using all these Parker solos, we were able to put the music back together. And like I was saying, the recordings we had were just these isolated Bird instrumentals and nothing else, unlike a record with the entire number. See, for the record dates in those days, because they were doing 78s, they had like about two or three minutes recording time or something, with each instrument, like the sax or the trumpet or maybe the piano doing a chorus each and then the record would end. But the live concert stuff was better for Charlie Parker, where there wasn't that restriction.

Did you have any idea that these original, bootleg kind of tapes were available?

I knew there were some previously unheard tapes out there. I knew there were the famous Benedetti tapes that people have talked about for years, done on acetate. Benedetti was this

guy who would go into the clubs where Parker was playing and hang a microphone over the stage. Parker liked him and let him do it, though the club's didn't always enjoy that. The mike and all that would just get in the way. There're stories of Benedetti sitting in the men's room with the recorder listening to Parker play. He'd record Bird's solos, and as soon as somebody else would start, he'd cut the tape. But a lot of people did this, not just Benedetti. Because Parker was so idolized, such an innovator, so far ahead of his time, people were always around to record him, though like Benedetti they'd drop everything else beside Parker.

So, I figured if I could find some of these tapes, that would be OK for the movie. Plus, a couple of the records were real good. We did buy "Now's the Time" from Savoy and "Parker's Mood" with the right to overdub the tape so we could make them stereo.

See, Parker never lived into the stereo age. Everything was done mono. It'll be Dolby for the theaters, Dolby four-track.

The music in the theater really sounds magnificent.

Yeah, it came out very well. If we hadn't found these original tracks I would have done the film anyway, though it wouldn't have been as rewarding. Not that there aren't great horn players out there to approach it as a sound-alike, but Parker was one of a kind. And we had these great tracks, and why not try to make it work? So we just tried. Rick Chace worked on them and then Bobby Fernandez [audio engineers] did. We just cleaned them up as best we could, did the sessions with the new musicians along with the isolated Bird solos. Lennie did a marvelous job, putting it all together.

And then we just started making the film, once we had all the tracks and knew it would work. Lennie also had to teach the actors how to play, like Forest (Whitaker, who plays Bird) with the saxophone. He actually taught Forest scales and later how to finger the solos, which of course is very difficult to do realistically. But Forest did it. He and Lennie worked very hard. All the actors did. Sam Wright who plays Dizzy. Michael Zelnicker who plays Red (Rodney). They were all really solid workers.

All the actors, especially Forest, look totally credible on screen.

Well, that's the main thing. Because I'd grown up watching a lot of biographies of various musicians in movies, and you can see the mistakes the actor would make. As a kid I really liked Bix Beiderbecke. I played cornet when Bix was like the biggest thing around. And then *Young Man with a Horn* came out and it was just way off, the breathing and the dubbing. It was really bad. I left the theater thinking an opportunity to do something special was really missed. I didn't think the people who made the movie really understood the music or really liked jazz. Jazz, I felt, was a true American art form that had never really been depicted. I just thought with *Bird* we could do something better.

And you had the opportunity to see Charlie Parker when you were young.

Yeah, in Oakland. I was in high school. I was about 16 and went to see Lester Young play at the sessions they had called "Jazz at the Philharmonic." Lester Young was a big favorite of mine. Also Coleman Hawkins was there, who I liked very much. Flip Phillips. Some really talented jazz guys. And then there was this alto sax player who suddenly got up and just started playing. He was wearing this pin stripe suit and just started going at it. And that was Charlie Parker. He was extremely impressive. He could just do anything with that horn. Just technically he was brilliant and innovative, and yet there was emotion and great sensitivity. And when it was over, you knew you'd heard something very, very special. It just opened up a whole new world.

Obviously it affected your ideas about music, but having experienced Bird, did it also give you a new outlook in terms of creativity or spontaneity?

I don't know if it consciously did. In terms of the great jazz virtuosos, like Louis Armstrong, who I also saw a lot as a kid, jazz always represented a sort of freedom of expression. Freedom in general but freedom of expression in an artistic way. Then to see something so new as Charlier Parker was like breaking a barrier.

People often don't realize it today because Bird was so overlooked historically, the same as a lot of those people were, but Bird was responsible for so many innovations with rhythm, harmony, melody, intonation, improvisation, and just on and on. A lot of his imitators got the credit for what he did. Even in his own day, the great saxophone players didn't play like he did, with those double notes and all those har-

monic changes he made. He was extremely original and just unbelievable to listen to.

In the way that jazz represented this kind of freedom, it also represented a certain social or political freedom.

Yeah, social freedom, too. That's why it's the true American art form. It's the freedom Americans dream of, a kind of freedom as idealized through sound, in a way. Whether all Americans have that kind of freedom is another thing. They dream of it, though most unfortunately never attain it.

It's questionable what kind of freedom Charlie Parker attained in his personal life. He wasn't disciplined and through a lot of bad habits he destroyed himself. He was also victimized by racism. There were clubs where he was the headliner and he'd have to go in the back door. But musically he could really express himself through a horn. There is a freedom about that kind of music.

You've always been a champion of civil rights. Did his music and jazz in general contribute to your ideas about that and social opportunities?

Well, I think so. Because jazz itself, if you look back on the early bands and the players in New Orleans and later when they moved up to Chicago and Kansas City, they were the pioneers of what was to come much later, a more integrated society, a new society. Everybody got along because they were interested in the same thing. Whether black or white, they played together. It was a subculture of what was to be more generally accepted only much later.

But even so, even up through the end of Armstrong's life, when he played with Jack Teagarden, bands were divided because of race. Not because they wanted it that way but because that's the only way they could get the booking. Consequently, some orchestras were all black and some were all white because they had to play circuits. And it wasn't just that way in the South. Even in Northern parts of the country, that's how it was. In the early days Stan Kenton's was an all-white band. Woody Herman was predominantly white, though sometimes mixed later on. And Dizzy and Count Basie and Duke Ellington were predominantly black. It was all kind of forced that way. You just couldn't book a band if it wasn't all one race. In later years Stan Kenton toured with Charlie Parker and quite successfully, but all that happened rather slowly.

In the movie, Charlie Parker takes Red Rodney along on a tour of the South, and the way they got around that was for Bird to introduce Red as an albino. Red claims that it was a true story, this crazy idea Parker had. And Red of course was this very white guy with flaming red hair. He'd get up there and sing this blues song and everybody would stare and none of the law enforcement people seemed to take issue with it. Like, what the hell, he must be an albino, if they say so.

One of the interesting things about the script is that it emulates Parker's music. There's a structural sort of freedom in the way that it wends forward and backward in time.

Yeah, it is reflective of the music. It floats back and forth between these periods of his life, and I didn't want to do condescending things, like start a scene with "July 10, 1944," or something like that. You just go there. By and large you're moving in and out of the time changes, just by the visuals or the general feel. I don't think it's anything people have any trouble with, though it is a movie you have to pay attention to. You can't just go out and, three 7-Ups later, ask, Where did I leave off? You have to kind of stay with it.

As far as the drugs in his life and the integration issue, we tried not to overemphasize either. There were touches here and there but we tried not to overstate anything. It was all just treated as part of the flow of events that contributed to his life. I mean, drugs were his downfall, but it was just one part of the story. The same with the idea of a mixed marriage, trying not to make a big deal out of it or treat it as some dramatic thing, though it was to much of society at that time. Basically, Charlie Parker and Chan were just two people in love. That's how we looked at it.

I'm not sure how most women will feel, but I thought Chan was one of the most fully liberated and independent female characterizations I could remember seeing on screen. In the context of the story, she was just way ahead of her time in terms of feminism, and she was never self-conscious or dogmatic. I would imagine though that 10 or 15 years ago that studios would have discouraged such a character, that maybe the general public in their view wouldn't have been ready for her.

Yeah, that could be true. I suppose at one

time you might've been encouraged to temper how we've portrayed her. I don't see that as a problem now, which shows how far things have come along. But essentially, that's just how she was.

Chan was just a free spirit, who did whatever compelled her. Social pieties and all that didn't mean much to her. She was a strong individual, and definitely the stronger of the two (between her and Parker). And how many girls and young women were running off with musicians in those days, especially jazz musicians, who kind of hung out on the periphery of things? It wasn't like going out with big established stars like Tommy Dorsey or Harry James. These were guys with a very different lifestyle.

But again, we weren't going out of our way to make a statement with that character. She was just a very different kind of person for that era.

What's she like today?

She lives in France, about an hour from Paris in this little town. She has another daughter from her marriage to Phil Woods, who she married after Parker. She's great to talk to, a great resource of information about Bird and that era.

Getting back to the Chan character, she's really not an exception to a lot of women characters in your films. Your women characters have always been pretty strong and independent. Marsha Mason in Heartbreak Ridge, *Genevieve Bujold in* Tightrope, *Sondra Locke in* The Gauntlet *or* Sudden Impact. *Kay Lenz in* Breezy, *Shirley MacLaine in* Two Mules for Sister Sara. *Those are a few that come to mind.*

Yeah, it's kind of ironic. Early on I was questioned about the roles women had in some of these films. Now people are calling me a feminist director. All along I just thought I was giving women good roles to play, which you always heard there was a lack of.

The pictures I liked as a kid often had women in strong roles. Barbara Stanwyck, Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Katherine Hepburn. They could all hold their own with any actor.

I think the secret to a well-defined male character is a strong female complement. She could even be the antagonist in some cases. But I think it's important for dramatic reasons alone that there's a balance there. Clark Gable in *It Happened One Night* was only as effective as the character Claudette Colbert had to play.

Chan (Diane Venora) in BIRD

In the films I've been in, if the character I play appears with some coy angelic little creature, I think it's a drag for both me and the audience. I'd rather not do movies where there's a theater full of guys and one girl dragged in by her brother.

I always liked women who were achievers, or who tried to do something. Even if they were housewives, who tried to do the best they could, whatever it might have been. Even back in the fifties I was advocating that women should be able to make more choices in their careers.

Didn't you try to get [actress-turned-director] Ida Lupino the opportunity to direct "Rawhide" [the TV program Eastwood appeared in from 1959–1966]?

Oh, yeah. I spoke to the producers about it. I'd always admired her as an actress and I'd seen some films she directed that were well done. So I thought, Why don't we try to get Ida Lupino for a few episodes? But the producers said, What d'ya mean? This is a man's show. I said, What's that got to do with it? It's not like she's going to be in the shot, out of character or something. And she's done "Have Gun Will Travel" (another TV Western series) and everybody over there thinks she's terrific. But it was a different era then, and I was a young actor they weren't going to listen to.

Obviously, Bird *is a film with predominantly black actors, and essentially about black culture in America. What people watching the film won't realize is that there were also a lot of*

black crew members on Bird *and many of them in very key production positions. It struck me as an implicit statement to the industry that there's a lot of black talent that's not often used, for both sides of the camera.* Bird *had, by far, the most integrated crew I've yet seen on a Hollywood film.*

As far as the cast is concerned, it only becomes a statement in that the picture demanded it be that way, because of course that's the way the characters were written. But there's a ton of wonderful black performers out there. And it's great that there're stories coming along that get to use them. It's too bad there aren't more. What's nice about *Bird* is that it's an intelligent story that isn't exploitive of black experiences.

With the crew, there's also a lot of black talent around and it's very good talent. I didn't hire them on this film because they were black, though. I'd use them on any picture. I just went after the best people I could get.

I think black crew personnel have been neglected in past eras. I think a lot of people were, in the days when the unions had everything pretty closed down. You had to have a relative to get in. When I first got into the business, you didn't get into camera, you didn't get into any of that stuff unless you had a relative. Acting was the easiest thing to get into, but the hardest thing to get a job in because there were so many people vying for each part. But as far as crew members, they were all controlled by the unions and unions were all on the seniority system. So minorities were left out of it.

Then, later on, people were forcing it to open up to more minorities, but they should have been open anyway. I always felt that everything should be open. People should be able to participate on their abilities. I'm not anti-union. I'm not pro-union. But I feel they were closed shops. A good example was the cameraman's union. They were pretty tight. You just didn't walk in off the street.

The Directors Guild, when you think of getting to be an AD [assistant director] now—it's hard to think of becoming a director yourself at some point, because there's all these various programs you have to go through. You have to pass some sort of test and you have to do some other things. In the old days, you'd hire a guy because you thought he was good. Nowadays you've got guilds dictating who does what.

Do you think that affects craftsmanship?

Well, there are some very good people in there. But what it does, it just limits the options. To me, when the incentive is strong to work, then the craftsmanship improves. But there are an awful lot of good craftsmen that get into these guilds.

The cinematography for Bird *is very interesting. Like a lot of your films, there're deep shadows and pools of darkness. Sometimes the actor is only partially lit, just the side of a face or a bar of light across the eyes. In one scene particularly, Bird is seated in an apartment talking to Chan, and just about everything in the shot is dark except a small glimmer of light on the side of his face.*

The usual lighting on an actor is a key light, a fill light, and a backlight. A lot of times, especially on Forest, we used only a key light. Sometimes the light came in straight from behind him, so he was just a silhouette backlit against smoke. There was hardly anything there.

One of the reasons we did this was to underscore his isolation. *Bird* is very much a one-light picture. By "one light" I mean the single key light on the actor. Sometimes just an edge light, as you described. An edge light is almost a backlight, but it comes around a little bit. There would usually be other lights in the scene, but lighting nothing but background.

I told Jack Green that I wanted to approach *Bird* as if it were a black-and-white film. We've done that before, like with *Tightrope.* You light the film for surfaces and spatial depth more than for color texture. Even with costumes, they tended to be dark and light rather than too colorful.

I just thought it was the appropriate way to do this film. Jack's worked with me for a long time and he was in sync with it. We tend to like the same things. I thought Jack did a great job.

What about directing Forest Whitaker and Diane Venora? They were both great in the film.

Well, they're terrific talents, great talents. They really gave a lot of themselves. They're both people who like to jump right in, to try things out. I didn't have to look very far to cast either one of them. I saw Diane on videotape, hadn't even met her, and I knew she was right for Chan immediately. They both did a lot of research and preparation before we got started.

With Forest, mostly I would try to keep him comfortable, secure. Forest in real life is an

introverted kind of guy. Kind of quiet but very talented. Sometimes you could see that he might second-guess himself. So I told him, You can handle a given scene a lot of ways, but keep in mind that your character has an ability to do something better than anyone else alive. You know, it's an underlying attribute that would inflect anything that person might do. And I would remind Forest that he was playing Charlie Parker. But actually, Forest understood that character very well. I thought he was about perfect for the part.

So it was that kind of thing. And then, to modify the ensemble, to keep the flow going and to work each scene until it felt right, by what I deem as the taste of the film. Because a director isn't just some guy walking around setting up shots or moving through the set with a viewfinder. You try to set up an atmosphere that's comfortable for everybody and in which each person is proud of their contribution. And these guys contributed a lot.

And you do like to improvise when you work.

Oh, yeah. Definitely. I'm never locked in. You go over the screenplay in your mind, and visualize the picture over and over. Then you see the sets and sometimes you can visually seize your expectations. Not always, but sometimes.

With the actors, I don't plan too much ahead what I think they should do. I don't like to stifle possibilities. I like to see how they feel with the scene at that moment. Acting to me is an immediate thing. I find with a lot of films, if they're overly set-up, if the director does a lot of takes or he doesn't know where he's going next or just goes along real slow, the lack of energy shows. They're technically nice but their soul is gone. I just like to keep moving, keep everything alive, so you make decisions instinctively, on reflex, without overthinking it. The more you have time to think it through, the more you have time to screw it up.

And you like to film the rehearsal if you have one.

Yeah, a lot of times I do. It's just more immediate and it shows on film. I've just learned that you have to trust your instincts. There's a moment when an actor has it, and he knows it. When you're behind the camera you sense that even more definitively. And once you feel it, you can't second-guess yourself.

I think that directing a film is *seeing* it, when you see it there live, when it's happening right there in front of you. Forest walks in and then Diane walks in and the scene just goes, right at the first instance of the first take. A lot of times it's a shock. You say, Jesus, that worked terrific. But you have to be able to say, That's what I want, and walk away. And if it's not working, you work until it does happen, even if it's the tenth take. But if it works immediately, you've got to have enough wherewithal to say, That's it. That's good. That's what I want. Because you have to know what you're looking for, and if you don't, you're not a director, you're a guesser.

Anybody can make a film if you shoot 40 or 50 takes on everything. If you run off enough footage you can assemble all that together and get something out of it. But whether it's any good or not, has any soul to it, is another thing again.

There's an important line in the film, where Bird is listening to Stravinsky's "Firebird." He turns to the young woman he's with and he says, "If we could hear every sound in the world, we'd go crazy." I thought that was the major clue to his character, that there was probably this roar inside that he was trying to quell somehow, through music or drugs or liquor or something else. He tells Chan at one point, You bring me peace, something like that. He seemed to be always seeking some kind of peace from these harsh sounds.

Well, first of all, Parker was interested in a lot of things. He was very interested in other music beside the kind he played. He was interested in Stravinsky and other twentieth-century composers. Ravel, Bartok, Debussy, for example. And then, on a different area of the spectrum, Stan Kenton remembers being on the road with him, driving along to a [performance] date, listening to country-and-western. And Stan Kenton would say to Parker, Don't you want to turn that off? And Parker would say, No, let's listen.

And he was like a sponge. He just absorbed everything. The other day I was listening to a test Parker did, warming up in the studio to get the levels right for the engineer. He's playing along and he just veered into some Scottish tempo, some little folk song. Obviously he heard it somewhere and he remembered it. Parker just loved sound and he loved to try things. Remember, he was a self-taught musician, and

very introspective about what you could do with a musical instrument. When he did a solo, or when he improvised, anything might happen. He was like an antenna for all those sounds in the world that he could hear, and he would transmit them for the audience right then and there. Maybe performing was a way for him to give order to all those sound impressions, the many things he heard all the time.

So he was a man of unusual sensitivity and feeling. Along with that, he didn't know how to curb things, to do things without excess. He would do things in extremes. He's like all geniuses, in that obviously there's something driving them. You don't expect them to submit to convention. Maybe they hear different things, see different things and that's why they express what other people don't or can't.

But then, too, Parker had this dream of a stable, middle-class life in the suburbs or out in the country. It was the complete opposite of the life he lived, probably even of the person he was. And once he has a semblance of that with Chan, it doesn't seem like he can tolerate it. Maybe it was *too* peaceful, but it was a fantasy he had. So there are some contradictions in his character.

I mean, he used drugs, the junk, but he's against anyone else using them. He tells Red Rodney in the movie, This isn't going to help you play any better. This won't make you play like Bird. He was a "Do as I say, not as I do" kind of person.

I remember reading, I think it was after the screening at the Cannes festival, where you were asked, Why did Bird do drugs? Apparently someone felt the film didn't adequately answer that. And I don't think it's a question anyone can really answer. It's kind of like "Rosebud."

Yeah. I mean, how come anybody does anything? If someone jumps off the Golden Gate Bridge, why did they do that? Do all the events of that person's life really add up and tell you *why*?

Parker was kind of spoiled by his mother. He wasn't taught a lot of restraint. She worked real hard and supported him, and as a teenager he practiced and played and went out and got drugs. He could have been out working but he wasn't. She didn't make it necessary for him to do that.

There've been other talents, of course—musicians, painters, physicians, whatever—who worked their way through school or night school and became good at something. That was their way.

All you've supposed to be left with at the end was why and how, because you don't have to have every answer. It isn't simple. I don't know if anyone really knows why he did some of the things he did. We spoke with his first wife, who Parker was married to as a teenager, and she doesn't know why he did drugs.

I was asked about this in France. Maybe there's another way to tell the story, but I told the story I had. I don't really think you could get any closer to what some of the reasons are, though.

Bird'*s done extremely well in Europe, especially in France. Was there anything in particular that Europeans were responsive to about the film?*

Most of the comments were that it was a film made with passion, that I had a passion for doing this. That was the gist of it, really.

But I'm happy to say the reviews were good, in *Cahiers du Cinéma, Liberación,* even by publications at different ends of the spectrum. There's this one publication that, as I understand it, just hates everything *Cahiers du Cinéma* likes and vice versa. But they both liked this.

I think the French liked the fact that this demanded something of the audience. They like to be challenged. One of the comments I get all the time over there is, Isn't Hollywood making films for adults anymore? Which isn't really true, but they ask that.

One thing I wanted to ask you about is that, in regard to many of the films that you've appeared in, there's a plot consistency, in a way, where the character is situated between opposing if not mutually exclusive moral forces. It starts with A Fistful of Dollars, *where the stranger is positioned between two warring families and later, by extension, between the US Army and the Mexican Army. In* High Plains Drifter *it's between the townspeople and the outlaws that threaten them. Your character's sympathies lie with neither side. Both are immoral and both antagonistic, to him and to each other. This pattern reappears in so many films:* Coogan's Bluff, Firefox, *all the Harry Callahan films,* The Outlaw Josey Wales, The Gauntlet, Joe Kidd *and even* Bronco Billy. *What it does*

is emphasize that character's isolation and forces upon him some moral imperative, mandates his individualism. So considering what I think is the consistency of that pattern, is it something you look for in roles for yourself, or create, or incorporate into the scripts on your own?

That is something a lot of those characters have in common, I guess. A lot of times it's shaped, and at other times it's added. But that's not to say that those characters are morally correct just because they're morally on their own. Everyone has moral limitations. They have principles of some kind, and out of their individualism they may draw a line as to how far they'll go. The particular moral value of each film and each character varies, I think.

Bronco Billy has a certain morality about loyalty. He gets himself humuliated by the sheriff so he could get his friend out of jail. Billy's a real American patriot but he would side with a friend who's wanted by the law as a military deserter.

Tom Highway in *Heartbreak Ridge* is proud of his military achievements, but there's a statement in the film about machismo and a certain anti-pseudo machismo, in a way. It's portrayed in the outrageous things this guy does.

But despite their faults, these characters are individuals. Harry of course is an individual. He had a certain philosophy that he couldn't get across to anyone else. Years ago, he was considered kind of a rightist, a conservative kind of guy.

That's kind of my point. All that business years ago, about Harry being a right winger or a neofascist, as some critics said, it seems to me that they were failing to see Harry in the larger context, this pattern where conventional references for morality is rather obscured.

Well, yeah, there were no conservative overtones. Actually, it was just critical people who took everything in political terms at that time. We weren't telling a conservative story. We were just doing a story that involved victims, victims of violent crime.

Harry asks the authorities, How come you let the guy go? And they say, Because that's the law. And Harry answers, Then the law is wrong. That doesn't mean you're a fascist. If fascism is blind obedience to authority, then Harry was really the opposite of fascist. He differs with the law in this case. And a lot of people differ with the law, have questions about it. We read about decisions every day that make us ask, How could they do that? There must be some kind of balance there where you can prevent a psychopath from going back out on the street and potentially committing another violent crime, which in the story he does.

The times have caught up with Harry to an extent. Nowadays there're organizations for the victims and the families of victims of violent crime. But in those days, when *Dirty Harry* was first released in theaters, there wasn't any of that. The tendency was to look at it in terms of the rights of the accused, Miranda and all that. We were merely suggesting that this was a case, an extreme case, where no one was taking the victim into consideration, and there was a serious time factor pertaining to her survival.

I don't think anybody really believes a police officer would go that far for somebody in trouble. I mean, that's kind of going overboard. Most of the time you figure, Well, you're off the case. It's closed. But here was this guy who lived alone and was obsessed with following it through. That was the romance, I think, because who believes there's some guy out there with that kind of tenacity?

I don't know necessarily agree with Dirty Harry's philosophy all the way down the line. I don't disagree with the importance of rights for the accused, either. But we were telling *a* story, an incident in one man's life. It was a story worth telling. But that doesn't mean we wouldn't turn around and do a story about someone who's been falsely accused or something.

You did that kind of story with Hang 'Em High. *And then there was the character of English, the elderly black man in* Escape from Alcatraz *(directed by Don Siegel, as was* Dirty Harry*). He was imprisoned for murdering a white man who had taunted him or insulted him racially in some kind of way. If I remember correctly, it was under circumstances quite questionable and complex.*

Yeah, that's right. He was falsely or unjustifiably put in prison. There were mitigating circumstances that English was bitter about, and justifiably.

Back to Bird. *Is there anything in particular about the film that you're most proud of?*

It's hard to be objective about it. I'm proud that we accomplished making the film. The film

was destined not to be made. We got it made and everything seemed to work, all the concepts, the original Charlie Parker music.

Also, of Charlie Parker's relatives and friends who've seen it, they're all moved by it and even a little spooked by it, that they were watching something they lived and they recognized as characteristic of what happened to them, and what Charlie Parker was like. I guess I'm as proud of that as I am of anything.

STEPHEN COOPER

Sex/Knowledge/Power in the Detective Genre

I am thinking of four films—*The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953), *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987)—as historical coordinates in the plot of an especially American male myth, that of the hard-boiled detective genre.[1] I am also thinking of myself as spectator, as an American male not altogether unaware of his own relation to the sexual problematics of that myth. In the following pages this relation will be given implicit utterance in the process of exploring the generic development of the detective myth as it is acted out in the character-codes of the respective protagonists of these films. I will argue that while the basic plot of the detective story remains synchronically the same over forty-some-years—the male quest, that is, through a morally ambiguous landscape for a solution to the specifics of mystery—the diachronic embodiment of the detective type undergoes such a profound growth in self-consciousness that the genre can be said effectively to have investigated and incriminated itself.

To be more specific, I am thinking of the relationships and the interrelationships of and among the male protagonists of these films with their second- or third-billed female counterparts. Functioning primarily as sexual foils to the detective, these female figures serve also as initial obstacles to and ultimate resources for the detective's inquisitive/acquisitive will-to-know. Notwithstanding the high profile given to "romantic interests" by the genre, such service suggests the exploitable continuum between, on the one hand, sex and knowledge, and, on the other, knowledge and power. But power, whether (sur)veiled or not, whether legal or illegal, is always repressive. Thus, although the detective's acquisition of knowledge does not automatically lead to the acquisition of conventionally recognized power (in its ultimate form, the power over life and death exerted by the state or by the state's criminal other), his search for "the facts"—i.e., his quest for knowledge—would seem consistently to imply his wish for the kind of personal power by virtue of which he will be able to (super)impose his own unifying version of the truth on the fragmented world of mystery.

By this I do not mean to make any hasty identification between the detective and the conventional forces of power, namely, the law and those arrayed against it. After all, in doing battle with both of these special-interest groups, the detective does maintain a position, both professional and moral, which is precariously marginal to either camp. Nor do I intend prematurely to sound the knell of the detective genre's demise, for, aside from sheer generic resilience, there is implicit in the very idea of genre the suggestion of, even the need for, frames of reference both past and future which by definition any specific manifestation must inhabit. But the corrupting tendencies associated with the will to power are sufficiently well known that most if not all of the unsavory repressive traces thereof in the detective's ostensibly honorable will to knowledge must be displaced onto conventionally unsympathetic members of the cast, notably the heavies and the police.[2] Thus privileging the centrifugal demands of the genre's semantics[3] for romantic tension-suspense-resolution, early film versions

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I am thinking of four films—*The Maltese Falcon* (John Huston, 1941), *The Big Heat* (Fritz Lang, 1953), *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski, 1974) and *Angel Heart* (Alan Parker, 1987)—as historical coordinates in the plot of an especially American male myth, that of the hard-boiled detective genre.[1] I am also thinking of myself as spectator, as an American male not altogether unaware of his own relation to the sexual problematics of that myth. In the following pages this relation will be given implicit utterance in the process of exploring the generic development of the detective myth as it is acted out in the character-codes of the respective protagonists of these films. I will argue that while the basic plot of the detective story remains synchronically the same over forty-some-years—the male quest, that is, through a morally ambiguous landscape for a solution to the specifics of mystery—the diachronic embodiment of the detective type undergoes such a profound growth in self-consciousness that the genre can be said effectively to have investigated and incriminated itself.

To be more specific, I am thinking of the relationships and the interrelationships of and among the male protagonists of these films with their second- or third-billed female counterparts. Functioning primarily as sexual foils to the detective, these female figures serve also as initial obstacles to and ultimate resources for the detective's inquisitive/acquisitive will-to-know. Notwithstanding the high profile given to "romantic interests" by the genre, such service suggests the exploitable continuum between, on the one hand, sex and knowledge, and, on the other, knowledge and power. But power, whether (sur)veiled or not, whether legal or illegal, is always repressive. Thus, although the detective's acquisition of knowledge does not automatically lead to the acquisition of conventionally recognized power (in its ultimate form, the power over life and death exerted by the state or by the state's criminal other), his search for "the facts"—i.e., his quest for knowledge—would seem consistently to imply his wish for the kind of personal power by virtue of which he will be able to (super)impose his own unifying version of the truth on the fragmented world of mystery.

By this I do not mean to make any hasty identification between the detective and the conventional forces of power, namely, the law and those arrayed against it. After all, in doing battle with both of these special-interest groups, the detective does maintain a position, both professional and moral, which is precariously marginal to either camp. Nor do I intend prematurely to sound the knell of the detective genre's demise, for, aside from sheer generic resilience, there is implicit in the very idea of genre the suggestion of, even the need for, frames of reference both past and future which by definition any specific manifestation must inhabit. But the corrupting tendencies associated with the will to power are sufficiently well known that most if not all of the unsavory repressive traces thereof in the detective's ostensibly honorable will to knowledge must be displaced onto conventionally unsympathetic members of the cast, notably the heavies and the police.[2] Thus privileging the centrifugal demands of the genre's semantics[3] for romantic tension-suspense-resolution, early film versions

of the myth avoid centripetally character-conscious self-reflexion in favor of the friction-driven dance, as it were, between male protagonist and female foil. Central but also subordinated to the main narrative quest plot, this relationship emphasizes external form and figure, measuring step for step the forward narrative pace.[4] The closer we come to the climax of the plot, the more passionate does the relationship between detective and woman become, until, justice done (or, as in later versions of the myth, rendered impossible by force of circumstances), they must separate and go their own ways. (For the woman this typically means a violent death or, as in *The Maltese Falcon,* twenty years in Tehachapi Prison.)[5] As everyone knows, however, tough guys don't dance, at least not until *Angel Heart;* but by then the tough-guy mask of the detective type is at the very point of self-deconstruction, having been seen through, exposed, and brought to the harshest of lights.

What I am arguing is that, like other structures of power, the detective genre over time develops its internal contradictions to such an extent that the genre's own eventual unraveling is self-assured. For all the putative personal integrity and independence ascribed to him by one of his earliest working theorists,[6] the detective in fact does align himself implicitly with the very forces of repressive power against which he struggles (to struggle), and in so doing ultimately victimizes the women he investigates/works for/loves. "I made sure she got hurt," Jake Gittes (Jack Nicholson) says in flat response to a question from current lover Evelyn Mulray (Faye Dunaway) about how he went about protecting a former lover in *Chinatown;* and it is only a matter of story-time until the same thing happens to her. As *Angel Heart* so broadly puts it in its late-excessive (yet still problematically evasive) way, the detective is one of the bad guys himself.

Hints of this alignment already abound in *The Maltese Falcon,* the film generally regarded as the prototype for the whole hard-boiled genre. In the opening scene of Huston's film, Humphrey Bogart as Dashiell Hammett's Sam Spade inaugurates the detective's commitment to professional duplicity by playing along with what he accurately guesses to be the emotional and factual pretense of "Miss Wonderly" (Mary Astor). Pretending to accept at face value her story of a missing sister, he leads her on through the obligatory detective-client interview, playing up his professional sincerity as incincerely as she does hers. The false air of solicitude which he exudes perfectly matches the overdrawn innocence of her performance, but subsequent scenes make it clear that he is aware, as she is not, of the other's play-acting. The imbalance of consciousness which the film thus insists upon from the very first of its male-female set pieces is further weighted toward the male's advantage when Spade's partner, Miles Archer, barges into Spade's office in the middle of the interview. Invited to stay, Archer ogles the prospective client from behind, leering and exchanging meaningful looks with Spade which reinforce the male's superior position with respect to the knowing control of the gaze.[7] Against Spade's straight-faced act of concern as he proceeds with his initial interrogation of "Miss Wonderly," Archer is all rolling eyes and smacking lips and foppish lady-killer mustache—the openly libidinous aspect of the detective hero which must be repressed at all accounts in order that the protagonist can appear to the world as a paradigm of self-control. This display is necessary precisely because the world of social convention allows itself to be governed by the law, while the detective, according to the myth, in his generic position on the shadowy edges of the law must depend on himself and no one else for governance. Once the pseudonymous Miss Wonderly is ushered out of their male domain, however, the two sides of the same detective (the names "Spade and Archer" on the office windows permeate the scene as if inseparably linked: faint trace, one is tempted to suspect, of Jekyll and Hyde) can conjoin to gloat over the woman's crisp hundred-dollar bills, and look forward to more from where these two came from. Given the detective hero's unconscious commitment to repression, however, it can be no coincidence that the lascivious Miles Archer is shot to death in the following scene, allowing Spade to proceed as if truly autonomous, the genre's ideological model of male self-containment. Of course Spade neither mourns nor wastes time in having Archer's name removed from his windows, through which anyone with open eyes, as it were, is apt to see: if anybody knows the dangers of incriminating evidence, it is the man whose job it is to pin it on others.

THE MALTESE FALCON: *Spade and Archer—soon to be just Spade*

As well, in fact, he should; for Spade has been sleeping with Archer's wife, now widow, another instance of his generic duplicity. When, however, the hopeful Iva Archer appears at his office begging, "Be kind to me, Sam, be kind," Spade's cynicism takes an openly cruel turn: he snarls and curls his lip, wolfishly baring his teeth, and taking pleasure in the woman's pathetic vulnerability.[8] It is as if the mutual knowledge of their sexual deceit has led to a particularly vicious power relationship, one in which the male has, and uses, the upper hand. It is only to remove her from his sight (note once again the male control of the gaze, even in the physical negation thereof) that he resorts to reassuring words, speaking to Iva's back so that only the audience can see the undisguised falseness in his face, in sharp contrast to the pained willingness to be lied to in hers. Interestingly, this scene foreshadows, in more ways than one, Spade's next meeting with "Miss Wonderly," now "Leblanc." After confessing her real name, Brigid O'Shaugnessy continues to overplay the sentimental innocent, prompting Spade finally to call her bluff. With all the facility of a trained actress, she immediately adopts the helpless tone of a conventional lady in distress ("I'm alone, afraid. I've got no one to help me. . . . Be generous. You're brave. You're strong.") only to have Spade sarcastically compliment her on her theatrical abilities, calling particular attention to her expert use of her eyes.

This emphasis on the eyes of the female is a feature which re-emerges in each of the subsequent three films under consideration. Thus when the face of the Gloria Grahame character is disfigured with hot coffee in *The Big Heat,* one half of her face disappears behind a highly stylized bandage, leaving her visible eye all the more vulnerably prominent. Likewise in *Chinatown,* Jack Nicholson notices a flaw in the iris of the same eye through which the fatal bullet will pass when Faye Dunaway is finally killed. And in *Angel Heart* Harold Angel (Mickey Rourke) simply tells Epiphany (Lisa Bonet) that she has beautiful eyes. All these female eyes prove to be obstacles blocking the detective's will to knowledge/power in their owners' ability, albeit temporary, to hide what they have witnessed: theft, murder, incest, rape. More important, however, they also act in aggregate as ultimate sources of the genre's deepest recognitions, the most damning of which is, via the adoption of their perspective, the disillusioned recognition of the detective's own self.

Such self-recognition does not come automatically, however. The tattered package that

Sam Spade carries with him down the stairs in the last scene of *The Maltese Falcon* may well be only "the stuff that dreams are made of" (a self-conscious line not found in Hammett's novel but attributed, rather, to Huston)[9] but the obstinate fact remains that Spade pointedly does not relinquish it. His received male view of the world—cynical, even callous, and with woman at the center of corruption—is only reinforced by the film's ending, so that his own taste for what is at best playful bullying (he suggests that Brigid hock her jewelry and furs in order to support herself after he has taken the last of her money) and at worst overt sadism (he places his hands on her throat as he speaks of her possible sentencing to the gallows) is left finally and problematically unexamined. Such an ending, with its romantically anti-heroic emphasis on the solitary male who is perhaps sadder but none the wiser, and who, more to the point, is also still in possession of the dominant sexual ideology (i.e., the stuff that dreams are made of), is the more troubling in light of the fact that Spade has just obliquely admitted his penchant for the ways of those he works so doggedly to "send over." In a sentence which compresses multiple ambiguities into the syntax of what is nothing if not a negative command —"Don't be so sure I'm as crooked as I'm supposed to be"—we recognize the same man of irony (or is it?) who drinks "Success to crime!" in the company of sworn officers of the law. The delayed irony upon irony here is that it is *not* a crime to behave just as he behaves toward women throughout the film, and as detective heroes do virtually throughout the entire genre. (If the objection is raised that this account conveniently omits any mention of Spade's secretary, Effie Perrine, it has only to be observed that her behavior throughout the story is so congenial to her boss that he pays her the ultimate phallocentric compliment of calling her "a good man.")

The Big Heat presents us with a different perspective on much the same basic vision. Whereas we discover police detective Bannion (Glenn Ford) at the beginning of this film happily married and at ease with the females in his life—he shares kitchen duties with his wife, tells cute bedtime stories to his little girl—the plot wastes no time in exploding that bubble: a car bomb meant for him accidentally kills his wife instead.[10] The overdrawn security of the domestic sphere thus instantaneously obliterated, Bannion soon finds himself pressured off the police force and into the monadic/nomadic life of the private detective, where the conventional rules of the genre again obtain.

Set in the Cold War 1950s, however, when such stabilizing structures of bourgeois ideology as the family, with its emphasis/dependence on monogamy and self-control, were under special pressure to compensate in the face of unprecedented global instability—largely a consequence of the biggest homewrecker of them all, *the* Bomb—*The Big Heat* would seem to situate its protagonist in a less compromised, less ambiguous, and thus less credible relation to women than the one acted out by Bogart's wolfish Sam Spade.[11] World War II, the global context in which *The Maltese Falcon* premiered, was a war which at least could be fought, so that, in an important sense to consider, the story could afford to play relatively faster and looser with the subjectively local (and male-dominated) battle of the sexes. Not as much would have been consciously or unconsciously assumed to be riding on the mandatory maintenance of traditional family ties when the country as a whole could still mobilize for active combat overseas. Besides, the narrative world of *The Maltese Falcon* is so decisively closed[12] that we hardly notice the virtual absence of normative family relationships: the Archer marriage is a sham, the Cairo-Gutman-Wilmer triangle is strongly suggestive of homosexuality, and only the manly-maternal Effie Perrine seems to have anything in the way of a blood relation (in the absent person of an offstage mother), while Brigid O'Shaugnessy's plot-initiating tale about her sister and parents turns out to be a complete fabrication. In *The Big Heat,* however, we are given to understand that the family actually does play an essential role—if also essentially arbitrary, in view of the fact that the crime lord Lagana also has a family and a daughter of his own. At any rate, the ideal family experience detailed at the beginning of the story functions in such a way that the widower Bannion, even when he is catapulted out of his matrimonial redoubt by the untimely death of his wife, can continue to function throughout the remainder of the film as a faithfully married man.

But what then of his complicity, if my thesis is to hold up, in the detective genre's commitment to the physical and emotional mistreat-

ment of women as a central element of the myth which that genre enshrines? It would seem that, if anything, Glenn Ford as Bannion remains irreproachable on the subject, the one upright man in a world most tellingly represented by the Lee Marvin character, Vince Stone, who stubs his cigarette out on the hand of a woman he does not even know, and throws scalding coffee in the face of his girlfriend. Indeed, Bannion consistently resists such obvious assaults against women, setting out, in the first place, to bring his wife's murderers to justice, and in the scene just alluded to making Stone apologize to the woman whose hand he has burned, and then driving him out of the bar. Moreover, when Debby Marsh (Gloria Grahame) appears in his hotel room and all but offers outright to climb into bed with him, Bannion politely but firmly declines, the very model of abiding fidelity. But once her face is disfigured, divided by the scar tissue into halves suggestive of good and bad selves, she returns to him sexlessly, as if purged of the bad, indeed the only way that he will suffer her to share his room. By way of sharp contrast, Bogart's Spade again comes to mind, cynically telling Brigid O'Shaugnessy that it is to their mutual advantage that she has not lived a good life, because "if you were innocent, we'd get nowhere." Could it be then that, in offering us this revisionist version of the detective, *The Big Heat* is calling into question the very terms of his existence? The answer to this question must be a qualified yes: to the extent that the film swerves from generic conventions it is indeed raising key, if not radical, questions. But whether it is in fact thereby subverting firmly established codes of character is another question altogether, and not one to be answered so readily.

While the film would seem to insist upon a hero untainted by universal corruption—this is a world, after all, in which the police commissioner plays poker with the thugs—Bannion himself in the end is reinstated all too easily and willingly into the symbiotic world of official law and out-law: he is given back his badge, his name plate, and his job. And yet there is about this willingness a curious quality of passivity, evident as he is ushered back through the ranks of uniformed officers to the desk which represents his true home. The other desks in the film over which the camera has lingered belong to, respectively, the policeman who commits

THE BIG HEAT: *Gloria Grahame and Glenn Ford*

suicide in the first frames of the film, and Lagana, who controls the police. Such obvious visual circularity leads to the inescapable inference that, for all the motivational faultlessness of Bannion's privately enacted will to knowledge, the will to power embedded therein is too thoroughly connected to his life as a cop to allow him to disengage from the circle. His character's rigid denial of all impulses not unambiguously legitimate underscores his total surrender to the forces of repression—the police force, as it were, within himself—well before the fatal car bomb goes off. In the end, his wife might as well have never been alive, because in the most important sense he is married not to her but to his job, a job which depends for its existence on the likes of the psychopathic Vince Stone. Significantly, the misogynous threat which Stone embodies is indirectly resurrected in the last line of the movie, when Bannion, on his way out to investigate the report of a hit-and-run case, orders the coffee to be kept hot for his return. As the rehabilitated Debby Marsh tells the crooked widow of the policeman suicide, "We're sisters under the mink." Likewise, Bannion's true family allegiance is to the larger family of cops and criminals, against which hearth and home are but puny defenses. Such recognitions regarding the thrust of generic implication in *The Big Heat,* however, are left for us to discover, and not the character who elicits them. It is not until *Chinatown* that the detective begins to suspect himself.

Removed from the era which it evokes (1930s Los Angeles) by some thirty to forty years, *Chinatown* cannot fail but to have a longer perspective on the genre. Such a perspective, inevitably more self-aware, may be said to suggest itself overtly in Jake Gittes's use of telephoto camera lenses and long-range binoculars

as he conducts his investigation first into falsely alleged matrimonial infidelities and then into more substantive political and moral corruption. As his relentless search for the geographical boundaries of this corruption takes him ever farther afield, away from the conventional urban cityscape of the genre, it also takes him psychologically inward toward its incestuous heart. This double movement of the narrative is effectively mirrored in the film's use of the particular story which it tells to investigate the genre which it extends; nor does the detective protagonist finally escape self-scrutiny.

Of all the detectives we are considering, however, Jake Gittes would appear at first glance our least likely candidate for the examined life. As played by Jack Nicholson, he is a coarse man given to two-tone shoes and tasteless sex jokes of the shaggy-dog variety, with little of Bogart's characteristic self-restraint, and none of Glenn Ford's unyielding integrity. He does "matrimonial work," the lowest kind a private detective can stoop to do, and he is not above exploiting the newspapers for personal publicity. Unlike Sam Spade, moreover, whose suspicions are on the alert from the very start, Gittes remains clueless for some time that the woman who approaches him at the beginning of the film, an impostor calling herself Evelyn Mulray, is telling him nothing but lies. When he comes face to face for the first time with the real Evelyn Mulray, however, who persuades him to understand that he has been tricked into publicly humiliating her, he is first stunned by her beauty and then propelled into the complicating action by her icy threat of legal proceedings.[13] While the initiating actions of their plots are thus remarkably similar—a woman comes to the detective offering misleading information—*Chinatown* and *The Maltese Falcon* differ significantly in the way that each establishes the protagonist's ability to sniff out, as it were, a lie. Nor is the nasal metaphor at all out of place. Caught comically off guard, Gittes must hustle to rectify his mistake, and in the process he nearly loses his nose. After having it slashed by the sadistic thug (played by Roman Polanski), he must wear a bandage through a good part of the subsequent film which is strangely reminiscent of that worn by Gloria Grahame in *The Big Heat*. Whereas hers covers her eye, however—the passive receiver of the male gaze—Nicholson's covers his nose, leaving both eyes free to probe, even while suggesting a tragicomic impairment of the detective's investigative-generative faculties. For while he can discover the still pool of evil in the destructive flow of Noah Cross's Water-and-Power monomania, he can finally do nothing creative or life-saving about it. And thus we return, as the detective genre insists we always must, to the problematic nexus of sex/knowledge/power.

Swept up in the narrative rush of incident and fact as he is swept up in the torrent of clandestinely released city water, the wisecracking Gittes, who at first acts as if he must know all there is to know about sexual foibles, finds himself investigating marital irregularities of positively monstrous dimensions.[14] As his wide-ranging search for knowledge, moreover, narrows down to the pin-point focus of the film—Noah Cross's rape of the land as it is embodied in the rape of his own daughter, and the subsequent siring of his own granddaughter—Gittes must begin to confront the ugly implications of his own role in Evelyn's victimization. It is, after all, in bed with Evelyn after sex that he has admitted his unintentional complicity in doing harm to a former lover. Now, having been mistakenly convinced that she has been lying to him, as he was previously convinced by her impostor's lies, Gittes realizes that he has all but sent her over, in Spade's laconic phrase, to her doom. The horrifying knowledge which he slaps out of her ("She's my sister *and* my daughter!") unveils the unspeakable power which Noah Cross (John Huston) is able and willing to employ, and against which the detective's feeble epistemic resources are ultimately impotent.

The utter futility of merely knowing is underscored in the final scene of the film. Welcoming the security of arrest ("Good news!") in the face of impending violence at the hands of Cross's henchman, Gittes enacts his own version of the detective's surrender to the repressive power of the Law, which makes sure that *in* justice is finally done. "He *owns* the police!" Evelyn cries of her father when Gittes urges her to let the police take care of him. Try as he might to deflect the tragic course of events to which he now knows himself instrumental, Gittes cannot deflect the aim of the officer whose shot pierces Evelyn's eye. The film ends with Gittes being released, as it were upon his own recognizance/recognition. Unlike Bannion in

ANGEL HEART: *Lisa Bonet, Mickey Rourke*

The Big Heat, however, who can return to the world of convention essentially unchanged by his odyssey underground, Gittes has learned all too well the extent of his own tragic involvement in the world of evil, against which irony is insufficient. Despite his associate's admonition to willed forgetfulness ("Forget it, Jake. It's Chinatown."), knowledge is all Gittes has left to him at the end, that and the prospect of living with what he has come to know. Thus blooded in his emergent self-consciousness, the detective can only plunge deeper into its depths, the generic (and unconscious) implications of which are made violently to gush forth in *Angel Heart.*

If *Chinatown*'s perspective on the detective genre is made longer by virtue of the date of its production, *Angel Heart* enjoys the added benefit of another decade. Before beginning my discussion of the film proper, however, I want to suggest that the graphic and narrative excesses of *Angel Heart,* as off-putting as they are, are exactly overdetermined by the whole history of the detective genre up to the moment which *Angel Heart* defines. This is not to suggest, I hasten to add, that *Angel Heart* is artistically equal to any of the other films I am considering. Among other things, some of its actors simply cannot act, notably Lisa Bonet in the role of Epiphany. Nevertheless, the film is worth attending to for its undeniable contribution to the growing self-consciousness of both the detective and the genre which he inhabits.

As if to geo-graph the surface contours of this immersion in psychological depths, *Angel Heart* sends its protagonist, the eponymous Harold Angel (Mickey Rourke), south from New York City to the outskirts of New Orleans, where the unlikely becomes all too everyday. "I'm from Brooklyn," Angel keeps repeating, by way of explaining his commonsense resistance to what he regards as merely the occult, but which for native locals constitutes the reality behind their visible world. If the film's heavy-handed displacement of the psychological into the realm of voodoo and, ultimately, horror, radically undermines all pretense of verisimilitude—the lack of which is, in itself, rarely sufficient cause to criticize genre films—it also enables the film-maker's indulgence in narrative and visual extremity. For all the unexplained, inexplicable and frankly irrelevant loose ends which litter the narrative (what, for a representative example, is Angel's "thing" about chickens, reiterated often enough to be downright annoying?), *Angel Heart* can claim illustrious precedent; not even Howard Hawks could keep track of all the plot lines in *The Big Sleep.* When we pause to consider, however, the extreme ways in which *Angel Heart* seeks to visualize its protagonist's unwitting investigation into the terms of his own identity, it becomes clear that new ground is being broken.

Of course sex is fundamental here, carnal knowledge itself as pre-revelation, where what is revealed is the motive will to power in the narrative will to know, and where the will to power is itself lethally psychopathic. But how else does the detective come to know except by exercising his eye, the preferred tool of penetration suggested in the term "private eye"? (Interestingly, *Angel Heart* carries over the suggestion of psychosexual damage done the detective's nose in *Chinatown* by outfitting its protagonist with a grotesque sun-guard from Coney Island: if ever there was one, a displaced prophylactic!) The taste for voyeurism to which the whole detective genre plays is thus here given full sway, in terms of what both Angel and Angel's audience come to see. What Stephen Heath has to say about the cinematic fragmentation of the body may be applied to *Angel Heart,* the primary aim of which is to dramatize the recognition of the paradoxically shattering reintegration of Harold Angel's known "self" with the repressed persona of the murderer within:

> And yet, again, cinema does fragment, plays—within the limits of the narrative and its meanings and resolution—on the passage between fragmented body and the image possession of the body whole, in order. . . .Yet then again, another twist, wanting to "see all" extends not just into the appropriation of

ANGEL HEART: *The Luciferian De Niro*

wholeness and unity but also into the desire for *everything,* all of the body, every bit: cinema plays on the hidden visible to be suggested, glimpsed, revealed, plays on the shown and the limits of the shown and the expectations and pleasures produced in the displacement and use of those limits. At the end of cinema is the pornographic film sold on "showing everything," *the* act, *the* scene . . .[15]

Heath's last comment succinctly explains the packaging of the *Angel Heart* videotape, which boasts "The Original Unedited Version." More to the point, though, is the developmental movement of the genre's emphasis on sex as the detective's problematically primary way to knowledge, the logical endpoint of which must be knowledge of self. Buckets of blood rain down upon them as Angel and Epiphany (no name is too obvious in this film) copulate, though we are given to understand that the blood exists only in Angel's troubled imagination. As it turns out, however, the blood is actually on his hands, and he discovers that it is he himself who has wreaked the mayhem which seems to dog him: the washed-out junky doctor shot through the eye, the black musician choked to death with his own dismembered penis, the tarot reader disembowelled, and finally Epiphany, shot point-blank in the vagina. If the mere written catalog of atrocities effectively brutalizes the eye, all the more so do the rendered images of the film. Indeed, Angel himself is so sickened at the spectacle of the eviscerated heart that the scene would seem to imply the death of pleasure itself in the genre's exploitation of the voyeuristic, an incrimination of the audience simultaneous with that of its detective hero. When Angel breaks down in front of the mirror, repeating over and over again, "I know who I am," the on-screen gaze which meets itself is replicated between screen and viewer. Angel is the Father, more Noah Cross than Cross himself, the embodied ideology of patriarchy who kills off anyone likely to betray his true identity and thus demystify him. He sleeps with his own daughter—the mother of his son, with which child he then identifies, appropriating an innocence which properly belongs to no one at all—and then he kills her rather than be named for who he is.[16]

A pretty picture this does not make, neither of Harold Angel nor of the genre as a whole, and yet I would argue that the logic of *Angel Heart* is inscribed in *The Maltese Falcon* as well as in those of its inheritors considered here. But of course that logic is obscured in *Angel Heart* just as effectively as (if more broadly than) it is obscured in all the others, blamed on the devil, the original Father of Lies. "I don't know anything about women," Sam Spade says early on *The Maltese Falcon,* and we wonder how seriously we are to take him; and then we recall Hammett's introductory description of Spade as looking "rather pleasantly like a blond Satan."[17] The hard-boiled detective genre which he inaugurated may be said to have been broken open by *Angel Heart,* comically cracked like the egg under the hand of Lucifer (Robert DeNiro) and consumed by the horror genre which he represents, but the problems raised by the genre's aesthetic—in particular those of sex and knowledge and power—await the further dialectic of deconstructive reconstitution.[18]

NOTES

1. John B. Cawelti calls the hard-boiled detective story "an important American myth." See his "*Chinatown* and Generic Transformation," in Barry Keith Grant, ed., *Film Genre Reader* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 184. James Naremore uses the term "male myth" in "John Huston and *The Maltese Falcon,*" *Literature/Film Quarterly,* vol. 1, no. 3.
2. For a provocative and influential discussion of sex, knowledge, and power, see Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* vol. 1 (New York: Vintage Books, 1980).
3. For a discussion of the term "semantic" as used here, see Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Film Genre," in Grant, pp. 26-40.
4. I am thinking obliquely here of Laura Mulvey's stop-and-go distinction between female spectacle and male narrative, though I do not "split" them as radically as she does. In the detective genre, at least, "the power of the male protagonist as he controls events" is by no means absolute, though Mulvey's argument would seem to make it out to be so. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen,* v. 16 (1975), pp. 6-18, especially p. 12.
5. To this general fact there are specific exceptions in which the male/female tension is happily resolved. *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946) comes to mind.
6. For the classic pronouncement on the detective's supposed code of honor, see Raymond Chandler's "The Simple Art of Murder," originally published in *Saturday Review of Literature,* November, 1944.

7. For her useful critique of the male gaze in cinema, see Mulvey, op. cit.
8. Hammett uses such lupine imagery often in describing Spade. For examples, see Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon,* 1929 (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 10, 188.
9. Naremore, p. 249.
10. Janey Place argues that the family setting in *The Big Heat* is "so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction. . . ." See her "Women in Film Noir" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 50.
11. This detour into the contextual world of fact, although it is merely a detour, should signal my tendency to disagree with Fowler's contention that in "trying to account for generic change . . . , it is not a good idea to turn immediately to explanation in terms of external causes, which may actually be quite remote." See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 277. While I would not wish to argue that it is a good idea to turn exclusively toward the external, neither do I think that the conditions of history are ever really remote from any artistic development. The sooner we can see the connections, I would say, the better for responsible criticism.
12. For his helpful discussion of "open" and "closed" films, see Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), especially pp. 44–51.
13. Mulvey's concept of female stop-action spectacle works quite nicely in this instance, while that of the male narrative determinant doesn't even apply.
14. Deborah Linderman offers an impressive and illuminating analysis of *Chinatown*'s oedipal commitments in "Oedipus in Chinatown," *enclitic* 10–11 (Fall 1981–Spring 1982), pp. 190–203. See also Liahna K. Babner, "*Chinatown,* City of Blight," *Los Angeles in Fiction,* David Fine, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 1984), pp. 243–255.
15. Stephen Heath, *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), pp. 184–5.
16. According to the structuralist view of classical narrative promulgated by Roland Barthes and glossed here by Altman, "plot follows an Oedipal configuration: both the protagonist's desire and the text itself are generated by a search for the Father. Like Oedipus, the protagonist is thus a detective." It is the detective genre's distinction to have completed that search with *Angel Heart*'s self-discovery. See Charles F. Altman, "Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Discourse," in Bill Nichols, ed., *Movies and Methods,* v. 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 519.
17. Hammett, p. 3.
18. Two other films come to mind with regard to the historical process of the detective genre's self-deconstruction: *Kiss Me Deadly* (Robert Aldrich, 1955) and *Gumshoe* (Stephen Frears, 1971). Both films prefigure *Angel Heart*'s tendency toward a deconstructive comedy of excess, though the respective protagonist of each differs significantly in degree of self-consciousness. While *Kiss Me Deadly*'s American-with-a-vengeance Mike Hammer (Ralph Meeker) remains obstinately, almost robotically unself-conscious, *Gumshoe*'s British comedian-turned-detective Eddie Ginley (Albert Finney) is undergoing nothing other than the frustrating refinement of (non-Freudian) psychotherapy.

Reviews

THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE

Written and directed by Anthony Thomas. Photography: Curtis Clark. Public Broadcasting System.

The style of the British documentary film-maker Antony Thomas is passionate and committed. He has a gentleman's *politesse,* but he's a good old-fashioned muckracker at heart; he's not afraid to ask embarrassing questions (and he's skillful enough to get away with it), or to let his own views filter into his interviews—to put himself on the line. And maybe, treating the explosion of the "born-again" Christian movement in this country since the watershed Baptist convention in Dallas in 1980, he's dug deeper than an American might have been able to. He lays out the issues with tremendous clarity; despite the amount of information the movie asks you to assimilate, you feel your head is being cleared out while you watch.

The movement is an outgrowth of Baptist Christianity, which refocused the basic Protestant impulse—the desire for a potential link between man and God—on the moment when a Christian receives God in his/her heart; this "personal salvation," known in contemporary religious jargon as the "born-again" moment, is the crucial step that guarantees today's churchgoers entrance to the kingdom of heaven—with no strings attached, if you listen to men of the cloth like Dr. Criswell, the minister of the First Baptist Church of Dallas (the largest Evangelist church in the country, with 26,000 members, or Dr. Paige Patterson, president of the Criswell Center for Biblical Studies (which turns out preachers). According to these men, heaven is the most exclusive of country clubs; there are no exceptions to the "born-again" entrance rule. (Patterson tells Thomas that even Mother Teresa is damned if she never has the "conversion experience.") Listening to Criswell and Patterson talk, you feel as if you'd fallen down a rabbit hole and ended up in a land where the Crusades are still being fought. The new pagans are the liberals (or "secular humanists") and especially the Communists.

Thomas shows us a sampler of people attracted by the movement. Some of the Christians he interviews have dreadful stories to tell, of alcoholism and dope addiction, incest and child rape, and you don't wonder that, finding God, they "felt clean for the first time" (as one woman explains, gripping her husband's hand,

7. For her useful critique of the male gaze in cinema, see Mulvey, op. cit.
8. Hammett uses such lupine imagery often in describing Spade. For examples, see Dashiell Hammett, *The Maltese Falcon,* 1929 (New York: Vintage Books, 1972), pp. 10, 188.
9. Naremore, p. 249.
10. Janey Place argues that the family setting in *The Big Heat* is "so fragile and ideal that we anxiously anticipate its destruction. . . ." See her "Women in Film Noir" in E. Ann Kaplan, ed., *Women in Film Noir* (London: British Film Institute, 1978), p. 50.
11. This detour into the contextual world of fact, although it is merely a detour, should signal my tendency to disagree with Fowler's contention that in "trying to account for generic change . . . , it is not a good idea to turn immediately to explanation in terms of external causes, which may actually be quite remote." See Alastair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), p. 277. While I would not wish to argue that it is a good idea to turn exclusively toward the external, neither do I think that the conditions of history are ever really remote from any artistic development. The sooner we can see the connections, I would say, the better for responsible criticism.
12. For his helpful discussion of "open" and "closed" films, see Leo Braudy, *The World in a Frame: What We See in Films* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), especially pp. 44–51.
13. Mulvey's concept of female stop-action spectacle works quite nicely in this instance, while that of the male narrative determinant doesn't even apply.
14. Deborah Linderman offers an impressive and illuminating analysis of *Chinatown*'s oedipal commitments in "Oedipus in Chinatown," *enclitic* 10–11 (Fall 1981–Spring 1982), pp. 190–203. See also Liahna K. Babner, "*Chinatown,* City of Blight," *Los Angeles in Fiction,* David Fine, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 1984), pp. 243–255.
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THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE: *The Church on the Rock, Rockwall, Texas (11,000 members)*

in a particularly touching interview)—you marvel, in some cases, that they were able to resurface at all and get their lives together. Thomas doesn't have it in for these people; he validates their need for some kind of affirmation, and the need of women and men in less desperate straits for respite, solace, and easy answers in the confusing world of the late twentieth century. His righteous quarrel is with those who rush into the void to supply these things: Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, the Bakkers, and less well known religious politicos like Morton Blackwell, who heads the Leadership Institute (the link between President Reagan and the "born-again" community, which he claims contributed over one billion dollars to conservative religious leaders in 1986 alone) and Gary Jarmin (whose publication, *The Christian Voice,* housed in Jim Bakker's Heritage, USA, claims to be "at the cutting edge of bringing the political technology" to this community). He exposes not only their mean private greeds—the appalling spectacle of Heritage, USA, Falwell's argument that God brought the Bakkers down, which prefaces the announcement that he's replaced them himself as the head of the PTL television network—but also their more alarming political agendas. Falwell says that God will destroy Russia; Richard Viguerie, who publishes *Conservative Digest,* explains the necessity of "bypassing" the leftists who have been controlling the airwaves until now. *The Christian Voice* issues "report cards" summing up the platforms of politicians who run against the representatives of the "born-again" community, simplifying their stands on complex issues to label them as, say, pro-pornography or pro-gay. (Jarmin has succeeded in turning nuclear armament and capital punishment into religious issues.)

Thomas's curiosity and intelligence, and his film-maker's instincts—which are given a boost by the classical, muted beauty of Curtis Clark's cinematography—keep your eyes and mouth wide open and your brain active. When you hear Pat Robertson warning listeners that they are committing "racial suicide" because in a hundred years "western peoples" will make up only four per cent of the world, or when an evangelist preacher says he's tired of perverts and Communists coming out of the closet ("It's time God's people came out of the closet"), you can almost hear Joe McCarthy screaming about the reds in the Senate and the hysterical voices of the early-sixties segregationists defending the purity of the white race. After waffling for a

year, PBS finally showed *Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done* in April, not long after re-running the superb *Eyes on the Prize* series about civil rights. The juxtaposition was frightening—you thought those paranoid crackers were dead and gone, and here they were again, still waving the American flag. (Criswell used to call integrationists "infidels" from his pulpit.)

You don't see many non-whites in the Dallas churches Thomas uses as his focus—Dallas being "the buckle on the Bible belt," the seat of the largest cluster of born-againers anywhere. Yo don't see many poor or homeless, either, except in Criswell's downtown revival church, which locks them out at night to sleep on the streets. In fact, Dallas evangelists preach what can only be called the rich man's gospel. "There's no virtue in being poor," says Criswell, and one of his colleagues, "Zieg" Ziegler, goes farther—he purports that prosperity is a sign of God's approval. We hear of Roberts Williams, who was forced to resign from Criswell's organization when he submitted a paper suggesting the rich have a responsibility to the poor; fundamentalists like Criswell, he explains, don't want to pass on any news that might unsettle their congregation and cut down the (impressive) numbers. ("You have a wrong idea of the gospel," is Criswell's reply when Thomas challenges him with the poverty of Christ's disciples.) This isn't just feel-good religion; it's religion that stuffs up the ears of the faithful so they won't hear the suffering right outside the church walls. (Dallas's poverty and crime rates are astronomical.) It marks the poor and destitute of this country (and other countries) as unworthy of attention, and encourages intolerance and callousness. We're hardly surprised to learn that all "born-again" paths lead to the White House. Reagan's appearance at the 1980 convention in Dallas provided the presidential seal of approval that sent the movement into the stratosphere. And after all, Reagan's cutbacks of funds to the poor and sick and dispossessed is the secular embodiment of religious elitism—Criswell's word made flesh.

Thy Kingdom Come offers a few glimpses of the ridiculous extremes of its subject. There's the amazing Jim-and-Tammy national soap opera, with Tammy weeping her eye liner into charcoal blotches as she moans that too many in the TV audience aren't following through on their pledges. ("Sometimes I get so tired of the worry of it," she cries, like the lyric of some country and western ballad.) There's Ruth Hunt, the dotty widow of H. L. Hunt, who leads Bible classes in her Mount Vernon mansion; and North Carolina's *Saturday Evening Post* small town, Heritage, USA, as defeating in its way as the electric parade on Disneyland's Main Street —it's so overwhelmingly kitschy you don't know how to begin to talk about it. The movie's creepiest moment comes in an interview with a disabled child named Kevin Whittum (he's eighteen but, due to a bone disease, he looks about eight) in whose honor Jim Bakker built "Kevin's House" in Heritage, for handicapped children; as of filming, no one except Kevin had ever lived there (and of course the fall of the Bakkers would put even his continued stay in jeopardy). Kevin's residence is his pay for doing PTL spots whenever he's asked. He tells Thomas that Kevin's House was built in 32 days—so there could be a dedication on the Fourth of July, and, he adds, because the Bakker regime was afraid he might die if they waited too long. When Thomas asks him which he believes was more important to his benefactors—the holiday or his health—Kevin answers in a tiny voice, "The Fourth of July, I guess." I can't remember the last documentary that engaged such a sensational topic on so many levels. —STEVE VINEBERG

FROM THE POLE TO THE EQUATOR

By Yevant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi. US distributor: Museum of Modern Art, New York.

From the Pole to the Equator, the new film by Italians Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi, generates a very complex viewing experience. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi are collectors, of objects and memorabilia of various kinds, and most importantly for our purposes, of old footage.[1] For *From the Pole to Equator,* they acquired the archives of Italian cinematographer Luca Comerio (1874–1940) who began recording exotic locations with Lumière cameras in the 1890s and continued to shoot (and collect) film through World War I. Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi reprinted selections from Comerio's 35mm films (they were still on nitrate stock), frame by frame onto 16mm and

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colored the imagery. The Comerio materials were then edited into an elaborate montage set to a score composed by Californians Keith Ullrich and Charles Anderson.

The audience of *From the Pole to the Equator* is able to retrieve some sense of how the original Comerio footage must have looked, and since Comerio was a skilled cinematographer with obvious artistic pretentions and achievements, this alone makes the film of considerable interest: we see well-made images of peoples, places, and experiences which were exotic enough when they were recorded for European audiences. With the passing of nearly a century, this footage has become as temporally remote from us as the locations it presents were geographically remote from audiences then—a fact regularly dramatized in the film by a variety of damages to the original 35mm materials carried over into the 16mm film.

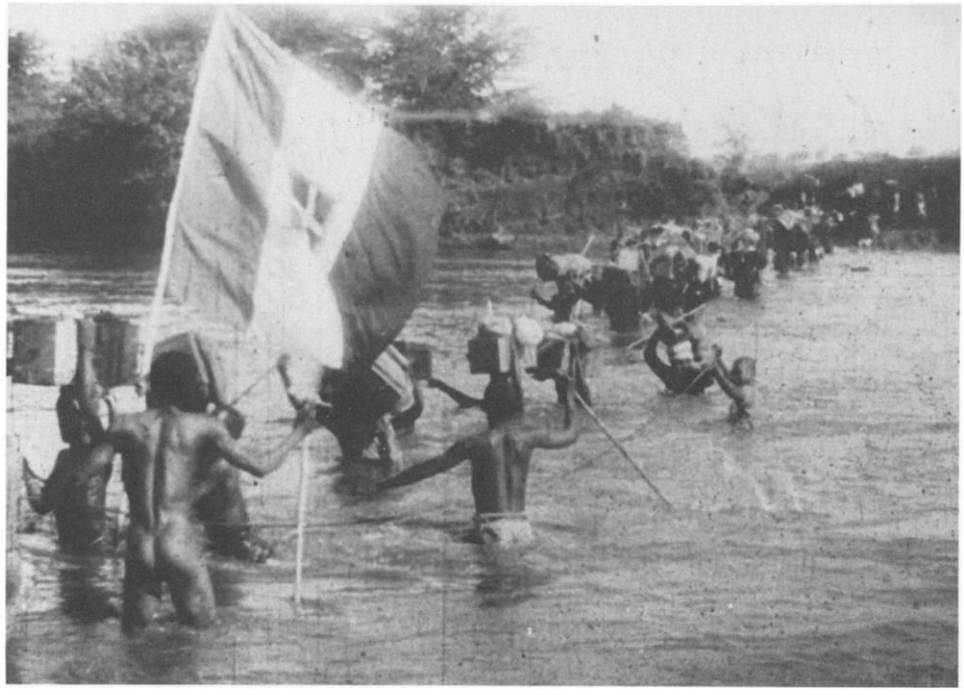
The film divides into passages which are not explicitly distinguished in the visuals, though they are usually signaled by changes in the music. Generally speaking, each passage is determined by a specific geographic locale. The opening section (most of the sections are from 7–10 minutes long; the final section is around 15 minutes) was filmed first from a train snaking through the Alps and subsequently from an Alpine tram car descending through the mountains into a village. The following section presents imagery Comerio filmed during an exploratory voyage to the South Pole. The focus is on the explorers observing and killing polar animals. The third section was shot at the frontier of the Russian and Persian empires; in general, its focus is on a local army which is apparently working with the visiting Italians. The next section reveals Italian soldiers and church people working among African peoples: Africans dance for the Europeans, march in Europeanized outfits; a child is baptized, a group of African children follow a nun's orders in a school. The film next moves to India where we see street scenes, life along country roads, a woman dancing for the camera, a parade of European royalty and military, and the activities of Buddhist monks; then returns to African locations: first Tangiers, where we see street and harbor scenes, and later, after a series of portraits, to (again, I'm guessing) Eritrea where local people seem to be performing a series of mock battles for the camera; and finally to Uganda, where Baron Franchetti—according to Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, "the Italian version of T. E. Lawrence"—kills a variety of animals (generally we see Franchetti shooting and the animals in the throes of death) and moves his entourage from place to place with the help of dozens of Africans. The final, somewhat longer section of the film presents footage from World War I: soldiers marching, riding horses and bicycles, and fighting in the field; in a number of instances we see soldiers die. Just at the end of the section we see a panoramic view of the words "VIVA IL RE" (Long Live the King) spelled out by sheep herded together. The film ends with a shot of a nobleman holding a rabbit just out of the reach of two dogs, to his own amusement and that of several women.[2]

The overall style of *From the Pole to the Equator*—both its editing style and its use of composition—developed in at least two stages. First, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi worked with material included in Comerio's own finished films (the success of his fiction film *Rocambole* in 1908 enabled him to establish one of the most successful Italian production companies; his famous montage film, also entitled *From the Pole to the Equator,* came later) and with materials Comerio had apparently planned to use in montage films that were not completed or have been lost. Though we cannot be sure of Comerio's editing style from what we see in the Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi film, it seems logical to assume that their montage film echoes his, at least in a general sense. On the other hand, we *can* sense the drama of Comerio's compositional style, which is evident through all the film's sections, from the dramatic pans over the Alpine landscape during the early train rides, to the careful framing of street scenes, to the frequently exquisite portrait filming, to the dramatic use of mattes in the hunting passages in Antarctica and in Uganda.

The second stage in the development of the style of the Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi *From the Pole to the Equator* involved their crucial decision to "analyze" the sequences they reprinted, a tactic which places *From the Pole to the Equator* within one of the central developments of recent avant-garde film.

Traditionally, avant-garde film has functioned as more than an alternative to the conventional, commercial cinema; it has positioned itself in critical opposition to the dominant approaches

FROM THE POLE TO THE EQUATOR *by Yervant Gianikian and Angela Ricci Lucchi*



and forms. While avant-garde film-making has continued to be economically marginal, it has used its marginality the way we use the margins of the pages of the books that are crucial in our lives—as free spaces within which we can develop a personally useful critique of the book's primary text. One element of this critical process has been to cinematically "rethink" areas of film history widely considered less than central. In recent years one of the most obvious of these areas have been what, not so long ago, was considered "primitive cinema": Edison, the Lumières, Méliès, Porter, Guy-Blaché, and other pioneers. From the late 1960s on, avant-garde film-makers were seeing the pioneers' little films not merely as necessary simple first steps in the direction of sophisticated "important" (i.e., economically successful) cinema narratives, but as sources of inspiration and as works of complexity in their own right. In some instances, film-makers made their respect for the early film-makers explicit: Jonas Mekas dedicated *Walden* to Lumière and emulated what he saw as the personalness and directness of Lumière films; *In Tom Tom the Pipers Son,* Ken Jacobs used rephotography to explore an early narrative. In other instances, this respect was implicit in film-makers' approaches: the Lumière and Edison equation of one shot = one film was emulated and extended by dozens of film-makers (Robert Nelson, Larry Gottheim, Morgan Fisher, J. J. Murphy . . .) who developed single-shot cinema into a sophisticated and flexible form during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Like so many American avant-garde film-makers, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi have been fascinated with early cinema for years. In the early 1980s they toured the United States with, among other films, *Karagoez-Catalogo 9.5* (1981), a two-part 16mm compilation film made up of excerpts taken from films once available in 9.5mm, an early European home-movie gauge with sprocket holes down the center of the film strip. As I remember (to my knowledge, the film is not available in the United States), *Karagoez* reprinted a variety of exotic imagery from commercial and other films.[3] In 1982, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi completed *Das Lied von der Erde—Gustav Mahler,* again using Pathé Baby 9.5mm materials—in this instance imagery recorded in various geographies, edited in an analogous relation to a reading of an essay on Mahler by T. W. Adorno. A version of the Mahler film was premiered at the 1982 Venice Festival, though it has not, to my knowledge, been screened in this country. The new film, *From the Pole to the Equator* (1986), is their most important work to date.

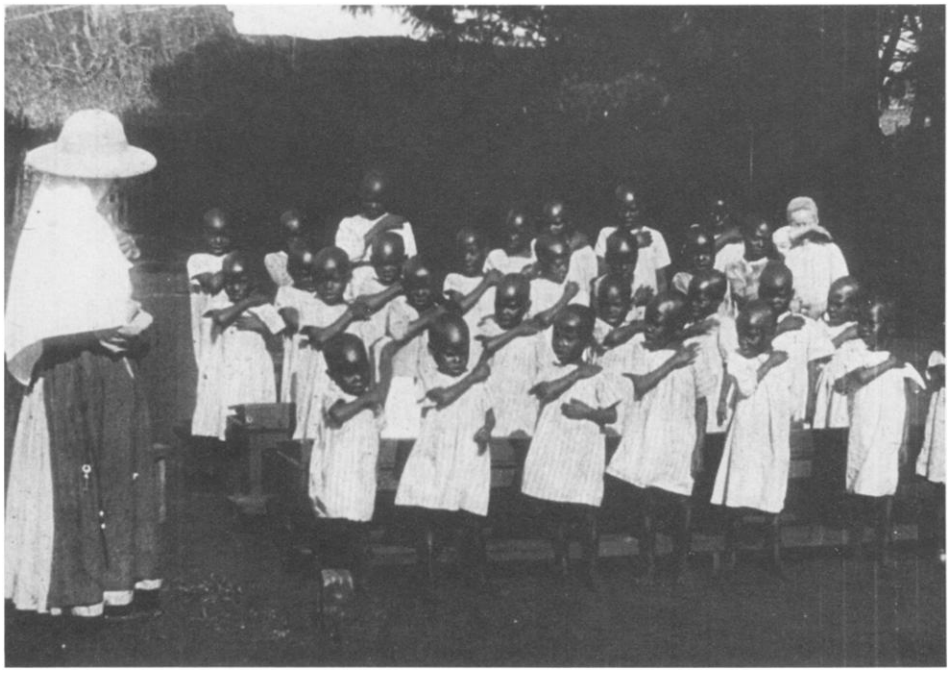
As suggested earlier, what makes *From the*

Pole to the Equator remarkable is the subtle manner in which Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi analyze the Comerio footage in the process of presenting it. While we can see its visual beauty and power, we never see the Comerio imagery at a normal, "realistic" speed. Generally speaking, the finished film hovers on the line between stop-action and the illusion of motion; it is as though we are continually watching the images come alive, slow down, come alive—as if we are witnessing the events we see through a medium which is itself just coming to life. More importantly, the particulars of Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's precise control of motion continually foreground elements of the imagery which would probably not have been evident in the original material—or at least would not be evident had they presented Comerio's films the way the Lumière films are presented in the compilation reels made available by contemporary 16mm distributors servicing the academic market. When we watch the standard Lumière compilation reels, the individual films function simply as examples of a film history, a mode of film practice, now left behind: presentation of the films on contemporary equipment eliminates not only the dramatic effect of the fact of motion itself, which must have invigorated screenings in the 1890s, but any particular sense of the specificity of the experiences recorded. We tend to see (now) just a train—any train—arriving at a station, some people leaving the Lumière factory, some children playing with boats in a Paris park. . . .

In *From the Pole to the Equator* the slowed, irregular pace of the imagery highlights particular details of expression, gesture, and action, so that we seem to be making contact with people and events on a far more dramatic and revealing level than we usually experience when we see early films.[4] My guess is that in the Gianikian/Ricci Lucchi film we are making contact with people at a level Comerio would not only not have expected, but would not have wanted (according to Gianikian, Comerio hoped to become Mussolini's documentarian in the sense that Riefenstahl was later to become Hitler's).[5] *From the Pole to the Equator* re-presents Comerio's cinematography so that it comments on itself—on his original motivations for recording the imagery we see, and on the moral and political implications of these motivations. It seems fair to assume that when Comerio originally recorded the imagery, his sense of the meaning of what he was doing was tied to notions of the "civilizing" impact of the European entry into African and Asian cultures and of the heroic nature of those explorers who lead expeditions to exotic places. The killing of animals in the polar and African sections was, no doubt, meant as a demonstration of the hunters' skill and prowess; and even the lovely portraits of exotic people seem part of a mind-set bent on sophisticated domination in the interest of heroic, glorious colonialization.

Of course, even if we were to see his imagery unmediated by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi, we would probably understand it differently than Comerio would, but their recycling dramatically extends the gap between Comerio's probable understanding of his images and ours. Their decisions about where to retard the imagery and which frames to highlight foreground the complexity of the exotic cultures and the humanity of the individuals who populate them. Comerio may have been fascinated with these people as representatives of a Difference to be overcome by the church and the military, but for contemporary viewers (at least for this viewer), this Difference is more to be admired than the power of those who would compromise it. In fact, because we see varied, complex cultures without the benefit (or detriment) of narration or any type of explanation (I assume the identities of some of these peoples would have been clearer to audiences at the original screenings, either because of informational intertitles or because at least some of the places and events would have been in the news), *From the Pole to the Equator* often reminds me of Trinh T. Minh-ha's *Naked Spaces: Living Is Round.*

Generally, the conquerors seem bored and boring, humorless and pretentious, almost oblivious to their surroundings. Near the end of the third section we see a portrait of a young woman; then we see her doing a folk dance with a man before a crowd of people presumably native to the region. In the middle of the crowd sit two men: one is (I assume) some sort of elder representative of these people, the other is an Italian officer. As the dancers perform, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's reprinting of the shot emphasizes the dancers' exotic gliding movements. Everyone in the shot seems to watch the dancers—except the Italian officer, who looks off-screen, seemingly unaware of the dance,



FROM THE POLE TO THE EQUATOR

daydreaming, one might infer, about future conquests or more "civilized" surroundings. In fact, while the individuals in the exotic cultures seem to enjoy what they do (the Indian dancer and musicians seem pleased to perform for the camera; the African men who assist the big game hunters seem proud of their part in events) and often seem happy to confront the camera's gaze, the Italians seem energized only by the pleasure of domination: we see them raise their guns to shoot, stand around rigidly in their military uniforms, ride in parades. They seem as unengaging as the bourgeois hunters in Peter Kubelka's *Our African Journey,* a film with which *From the Pole to the Equator* has much in common, at least thematically.

The subtle "analysis" provided by Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi's precise modulation of the speed with which we see the individual frames of Comerio's imagery (and by the more conventional gestures of their editing) is confirmed and extended by the sound track and by their use of color. The Adnerson/Ullrich score is reminiscent of the serial music of Philip Glass, Terry Reilly, and Steve Reich, and its use in *From the Pole to the Equator* is reminiscent of the Glass sound track for *Koyaanisquatsi,* though the mood is darker. (The Anderson/Ullrich music is available on tape from Terry Cannon, at Little Sun, PO Box 1850, Monrovia, CA 91016.) The Anderson/Ullrich music is eerie, haunting; it tends to emphasize the grimness of the events we are watching, even in instances where the imagery itself seems relatively neutral. The music helps to convey a sense of overwhelming sadness about the events Comerio documents, about what was lost through the colonialization and domination of people and animals. It also periodically dramatizes our historical complicity in the events; at times, the people we see seem to dance to the music *we're* hearing, particularly during the earlier passages filmed in Africa. These momentary synchronizations of image and sound reaffirm a fact which is implicit throughout: that we, sitting in a theater, fascinated with the people and events Comerio has captured, are the benefactors not only of his film-making, but of the processes of power and domination he documents for us. In fact, Comerio's footage dramatizes—as fully as any early footage I've seen—the degree to which the camera is one of the spearheads of empire. The Africans and Indians dance to the beat of *our* drum as fully as they danced for the conquerors, and in a historical sense we're probably no more prepossessing than the soldiers and church people whose commitment to colonialization many of us are likely to abhor.

The schizoid emotional quality of *From the Pole to the Equator* is emphasized by the obvious pains Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi took with color. In a general sense their color is reminis-

cent of that used in early film: monochrome tinting, and in a few instances, hand-coloring, frame by frame. But the way in which the color is articulated is different from the use of color in the few contemporary prints of early films I'm aware of. Most of *From the Pole to the Equator* is tinted, but while the color is monochromatic within any given frame, the color varies from moment to moment. A passage may be green, but the quality of green will continually change. More dramatic shifts in color do separate sections of the film from each other (the move from the train section to the Antarctic section early in the film is signaled by a change from green-tinted imagery to cold blue-tinted imagery, which is made all the more dramatic by the fact that the train section has been exclusively greens and reds); however, dramatic shifts in color can occur anytime during a passage, and in some cases within a continuous shot. In other words, the use of tinting is not tied to the specifics of the content, as it is for example in the Killiam prints of Griffith's films.

The color in those infrequent passages when Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi forego tinting for multi-toned hand-coloring is realistic, but the fact of its being embedded in passages of tinted imagery renders it different in impact from a Méliès hand-colored film. The fact that the more painstaking use of multiple colors is confined to the section documenting India is probably no accident: the majority of multicolored moments seem to relate to the activities of Buddhist monks. It may be that Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi highlight the monks because, of all the Comerio imagery they reprinted, these images most nearly represent the philosophic opposite of the imperial quest so powerfully documented during the remainder of the film. Overall, the color in *From the Pole to the Equator* has a double impact which befits the film's complex mood: the color makes the film more sensuously beautiful, more watchable (certainly this is one of the most sensuously gorgeous films of recent years) so that we can more deeply experience the horror it captures and our complicity with it.

SCOTT MACDONALD

NOTES

1. Some years ago, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi toured the United States with films which catalogued items from their collections. As an accompaniment to their visuals, they burned scents from their collection of scents on Bunsen burners in the front of the theater.
2. While in general the imagery in any given passage is restricted to the particular location being explored, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi do at times use shots from one location within a passage devoted to another. At the end of the polar expedition passage, for example, we see two shots which take place in a winterscape, but which, we realize later, are taken from the material on World War I. On first viewing these exceptions are no problem, but on subsequent viewings I've found them distracting—like a loose end.
3. During that first American tour, Gianikian and Ricci Lucchi sometimes showed *Essence of Absynthe,* a short porn film from the period before 1910; as I remember, the film centered on two women and a man engaged in the standard for-the-camera blow job, but—touchingly, somehow—the three performers at times burst into laughter, seemingly at the absurdity of the process they're involved in.
4. Much the same effect is achieved in much the same way in Ernie Gehr's remarkable *Eureka* (1979): Gehr reprinted what was originally a long single shot, filmed (for a Hale's Tours presentation) from the front of a trolley car travelling down Market Street in San Francisco to the end of the line, so that the details of the amazingly complex street are not merely entertaining (as they would have been for the Hale's Tours audience), but create a sense of Market Street as a microcosm of a nation in the process of cataclysmic technological and social change.
5. Gianikian mentioned Comerio's interest in Italian fascism when he visited the Flaherty Film Seminar in the summer of 1987.

A WORLD APART

Director: Chris Menges. Script: Shawn Slovo. Photography: Peter Biziou. Editing: Nicholas Gaster. Music: Hans Zimmer. Atlantic Releasing.

Chris Menges, who began by making documentaries and then became one of the world's great cinematographers (he shot *Local Hero, Comfort and Joy, The Killing Fields,* and *High Season*), has made a powerful and unusual film about apartheid. *A World Apart* stars Barbara Hershey as Diana Roth, who is based on South African journalist Ruth First, the first white to be arrested (in 1963) under the Ninety Days Act. (This infamous act states that anyone may be held without trial for ninety days at a stretch.) Apartheid is a booby-trapped movie subject; film-makers who try to depict the struggles of blacks in South Africa generally end up romanticizing their plight and reducing the pro-apartheid whites to heartless villains, because (for western art-house audiences at least) there's no counterargument you could make convincing. (The scowling faces of the white cops in the TV movie *Mandela,* shot in close-ups so extreme they begin to distort like fish-eye lenses, are an example of just what you can expect most directors to come up with.) Wisely, Menges has looked for complexity in other corners. Working from a superb screenplay by First's daughter, Shawn Slovo, which focuses on how

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the political activity of parents affects their children (the subject of the botched *Daniel*), Menges has framed Diana Roth's story as a coming-of-age film in which the central character is her eldest daughter Molly, who is just entering adolescence when her father, Gus (Jeroen Krabbe), is forced to leave the country and her mother is thrown in jail. (In reality Ruth First was assassinated by a letter bomb in 1982, but the movie restricts itself to the events of 1963.)

As played by the remarkable young actress Jodhi May, Molly is at the tail end of her in-between stage—she's taller than her classmates, like Frankie Addams in *The Member of the Wedding,* but she's already acquired a teenage litheness and gracefulness, and her schoolgirlish giggling sessions with her best friend Yvonne (Nadine Chalmers) are touched with a self-conscious femininity. We can see from the outset that this kid is different from her peers: riding home after school with Yvonne and her mother (Kate Fitzpatrick), she sees a black man injured in a hit-and-run accident, and without hesitation she suggests they give the victim a lift to the hospital. Yvonne's mother, who has a sloppy but charming aristocratic mien, backs off, explaining it's best not to get involved. This scene, which communicates an amazing amount about the South Africa of the early sixties in an understated dramatic shorthand, pulls us into the movie immediately. It's hard for Molly to fathom this adult's reasoning. She's used to her mother's racially mixed parties, where the guests are trained to dump their glasses of liquor as soon as someone spots a cop car, because Diana could be arrested for serving alcohol to blacks. She has an intimate relationship with Elsie (Linda Mvusi), the Roths' housekeeper, who teaches her the African national anthem in her room at night and whose brother Solomon (Albee Lesotho, in a joyously expressive performance) is a revolutionary just released from prison. Invited to a party given by Yvonne's parents, she balks when her friend calls a black servant "boy" and retreats to the kitchen, where the faces are familiar and she feels more at home.

The film-makers establish Molly's liberal impulses—the legacy of her parents—very early, and then set up her difficult relationship with Diana in opposition to it. Diana's professional and private commitment to the oppressed blacks leaves her less time for Molly and her two younger sisters (Carolyn Clayton-Cragg and Merav Gruer) than they need, especially after Gus's departure; she counts on her mother, Bertha (Yvonne Bryceland), to fill in, and she depends on Molly to act grown-up and accept her priorities. But Molly's still a child, and anyway Diana isn't consistent in her treatment of the girl—Molly's curious about her political life, but Diana excludes her, growing angry when Molly walks into her study without knocking and discovers her hiding place for incendiary documents. You can certainly understand Diana's reticence to let Molly in on such dangerous secrets, or to bring her along when she covers strikes and protest marches, but you can sympathize with Molly's frustration, too: if Diana doesn't have time to tune in on her life (when Molly tries to tell her about the hit and run, Diana isn't listening—her attention is elsewhere), it doesn't seem fair that *she* can't share *Diana's* life either. The scenes between Molly and Diana are the most trenchant depiction of a mother-daughter relationship in recent memory, with the sole exception of Gillian Armstrong's *High Tide.* Slovo and Menges get into issues that movies about domestic tensions almost never go near. When Molly tells her mother she misses Gus, Diana's reply, "So do I," has an unexpected sharpness; the subtext seems to be, "Don't you think *I* do?" or even "What makes you think your feelings are as important as mine?"

Menges and Slovo chronicle Molly's struggle between her instinctive humanity and empathy for her black countrymen, and her anger at being abandoned by her parents. She learns the lessons of integrity and fidelity years before she ought to have them thrust upon her, and she learns them brutally; they're like switches slashing across her open face. She's increasingly isolated from her schoolmates; like cruel, absurd miniatures of their parents, they scrawl "Traitor" across scraps of paper and leave them in her locker, or demand to know why her father doesn't come back to South Africa and "take his punishment like a man." At first, Yvonne sides with Molly, but when she's out of school for a few weeks, in mourning for her mother's departure, Yvonne grows naturally close to some of the other girls. And then Molly figures out that Yvonne's parents have instructed her to stay away from this subversive's child. (In

one shocking scene, she shows up at Yvonne's gate after she's been told on the telephone her friend's not at home, and Yvonne's father chases after her, dragging her into his car to drive her back.) Jodhi May keeps us in close touch with Molly's hurt and her ambivalence. Molly feels the same injustices her mother feels, but she can't help a childish wish that her parents were like the parents of her classmates, leaving the woes of the world to be attended to by other hands. She's not comfortable singing the white South Africans' anthem—the official one—with her classmates (she keeps her mouth closed, mumbling only a few of the words), but whe Elsie takes her to a church meeting and the black men and women all around her burst into a spirited chorus of the black anthem Elsie's been teaching her, she doesn't want to sing along; she doesn't feel part of that community, either—not in her mother's absence. (Menges resolves this motif at the end, triumphantly.) Crying over and over, "Mummy, don't go!" when Diana is taken away—as if Mummy had any control over the situation—she seems little more than a baby.

Like *High Tide, A World Apart* draws you into a realm of female relationships, a realm that men are seldom privy to. There are only a handful of male characters (Solomon; Diana's photographer, Harold; her interrogator; Yvonne's father; and—very briefly—Gus Roth) and a great many females; even though the screenwriter's a woman, it's hard to believe a male director could do such a splendid job of evoking the delicately piercing mood of feminine domesticity. The mainstays that allow Menges to accomplish this are four wonderful actresses, including Jodhi May. Barbara Hershey gives an unflinching, masterfully controlled performance that's beyond anything one might have anticipated from her; Linda Mvusi's expressions of grief when Elsie receives bad news about Solomon are worthy to stand beside the purest expressions of emotion in Cicely Tyson's performances. And the South African stage actress Yvonne Bryceland plays the less flamboyant role of Bertha. There's a scene where Bertha takes her granddaughters to visit Diana in jail, only to learn she's been transferred to another city; a tightness in the jaw, an unsettling inner focus, and the actress has told us how deeply the disappointment has affected Bertha. (Bertha knows what Diana later conveys to Molly—that prison is the fortress of the enemy, and you don't ever display your pain in front of the enemy.) When we're told, a couple of scenes later, that Bertha is no longer taking care of the girls because she's had a minor breakdown, we're not surprised.

Beautifully shot (by Peter Biziou) and edited (by Nicholas Gaster), *A World Apart* is a stunning feature film debut for Menges. You can see what he picked up from his experience as a documentarian and from Roland Joffe on *The Killing Fields*—a willingness to let the power of images make the political points—and, much more, what he got from Bill Forsyth: a sense for the telling human detail. When Diana, thrown into a cell, is denied reading matter or writing implements, she hoists herself up to look out the barred window; across the street, a newspaper headline is printed on a pole, and she struggles to put it together from the letters she can see. In this brief silent scene, Menges tells us what it must be like for a woman whose life is defined by the acts of reading and writing to be suddenly deprived of them. When her ninety days are up and she finds herself clapped in jail again for a second term the moment she steps outside, she throws a tantrum, smashing the furniture in her cell, and Menges shows us two female guards peering through the keyhole of her cell, in wonder and awe, unable to do anything but watch. They may be sympathetic to her pain, but they can't begin to comprehend what she's going through.

Sensitive and unsensational as they are, the prison scenes (featuring David Suchet as Diana's chief interrogator) don't stay in the memory the way the domestic scenes do, because Jodhi May isn't in them. And Menges errs, I think, in providing a final image that shifts away from Molly and Diana—especially since, five minutes earlier, he gave us the scene the movie had been working towards and needed so badly: a shattering confrontation between mother and daughter where Molly breaks through to Diana and makes her understand what she's been feeling. But these are quibbles. A friend of mine who was tremendously moved by the film told me she thought the whole picture was summed up in the moment near the end when Molly cries, "It's not fair!" to her mother and Diana offers the only consolation she can—she agrees with her. *A World Apart* travels from the separate agonies of mother and daughter to a shared

agony, offering it up as the only possible salvation. Chris Menges works with an instinctual honesty most film-makers can't even conceive of. —STEVE VINEBERG

RED SORGHUM

Director: Zhang Yimou. Production: Xian Film Studio and Wu Tianming. Script: Chen Jainyu, Zhu Wei, Mo Yan. Photography: Gu Changwei. Music: Zhao Jiping. New Yorker Films.

The aftermath of the cultural revolution gave birth to a new age in Chinese cinema which, in recent years, has produced films such as Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth* and *The Big Parade,* Wu Tianming's *Old Well,* and Tian Zhuangzhunag's *The Horse Thief,* all winning great acclaim at international film festivals. Zhang Yimou's *Red Sorghum,* however, won the Golden Bear at the 1988 Berlin film festival, thus becoming the first Chinese film to achieve the highest honor at one of the leading international festivals.

Among China's new-wave directors, Zhang Yimou is a very special talent. He was the cinematographer for *Yellow Earth* and *The Big Parade* and his involvement in both films is regarded as having played a major part in their success. His brilliance as an actor was clearly displayed in his performance in *Old Well,* for which he won the Best Actor award at the 1987 Tokyo film festival. *Red Sorghum* is his debut as a director and its success at Berlin shot him to international stardom. It was selected as the closing-night film of the 1988 New York film festival and was subsequently released in the United states; it's even under consideration for an Academy Award.

The story of *Red Sorghum* is set in the 1930s and is based on a Northern Chinese legend. A young woman is coerced by her father into marriage with the leprous owner of a sorghum wine distillery merely because the latter offers her father a mule as a betrothal gift. On her way to the bridegroom's house, however, she and one of her sedan chair carriers are attracted to each other. The day after the wedding, on the return journey to her father's house, she is accosted by the sedan carrier and they make love in the sorghum field. When she returns to the leper's house, the latter is found mysteriously murdered. The young woman then becomes the owner of the distillery, and soon after that, the sedan carrier moves in to live with her. Over the next few years, the couple and the distillery workers live together harmoniously—their small community remains simple and free despite the depressing reality of the world outside. This small island of peace is, however, suddenly disrupted by the Japanese invasion. The ex-foreman of the distillery, Luohan, a universally respected member of the community, is skinned alive by the Japanese because of his "subversive" activities. In order to avenge Luohan's death, the couple organize an ambush to kill the Japanese soldiers and to blow up their truck. In the ensuing battle, however, the woman and all the distillery workers are killed, leaving the man and their nine-year-old son as the sole survivors.

The story of *Red Sorghum* is basically about the life of the couple and their small community who cherish freedom and resist oppression. It is their love of freedom versus the heavy weight of either tradition or the Japanese invasion that produces the film's tragic conflict. However, beyond this collision, there is a subtle mixture of their passion for freedom and their primitive and sometimes bawdy mentality. Despite their desire to transcend tradition, they are rooted in a primitive culture which is not conducive to enlightenment. In the film, we see them pray twice to the Wine God to express their desire for a better life and freedom:

> If you drink our wine,
> You'll breathe well and you won't cough;
> If you drink our wine,
> You'll be well and your mouth won't smell bad;
> If you drink our wine,
> You'll dare go through Qingshakou alone;
> If you drink our wine,
> You won't kowtow to the emperor . . .

Every word is passionately sung, but the idea of the prayer is so simple and naive that its meaning is in fact hollow. The two praying scenes are both prolonged and the empty prayer seems to be thus underscored. Beside the prayer, we also hear two ballads, one chanted by the father bravely challenging the oppression of tradition and the other by the son looking forward to a beautiful future. Both ballads sound as passionate as the prayer, but they are also just as empty as the latter. The immature idealism represented by these empty words reminds us of the idealis-

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RED SORGHUM: *Father and son left with their dead*

tic philosophy inherent in the whole Chinese cultural tradition. Traditional Chinese culture tends to preach empty lectures about traditional moral principles such as "loyalty, filial duty, benevolence, and righteousness"—all merely idealistic platitudes. Contemporary Chinese culture, however, tries to inculcate optimistic slogans about the bright future of socialism and communism which are nothing but propaganda. If we take into consideration the fact that the whole Chinese cultural tradition favors an idealistic rather than a rationalistic approach, the insignificant prayer as well as the ballads in the film no longer seem so insignificant in the context of China's past and present. Seeing these simple primitive people bullied and killed by the Japanese with all their modern technology, we are actually witnessing the tragedy of an old culture in today's world.

Beside what is suggested by the film's story, the film is also narrated by its imagery. First of all, as the film's title suggests, the image of the sorghum field appears again and again on the screen, which seems to be just a symbol of a primitive culture. Characters are often seen surrounded by thick sorghum, thus creating a feeling of people confined by their environment. Aside from the overall symbolism of sorghum, the use of lighting and color plays an even more important role in creating meaningful images. The opening shot begins with a completely dark screen, indicating a depressing environment. Then, gradually, the female protagonist fades in, wearing a red jacket and a red bridal veil over her head, thus forming a contrast of dark and red within the frame. If the dark symbolizes a stifling environment, the color red suggests the woman's passion, which actually foreshadows the main theme of the whole film. As the narrative proceeds, we notice that dark lighting is used for almost all the night scenes and indoor scenes, and red is actually the key color in the film—expressed in the use of red clothes, red flames, and even a red filter, thus establishing a constant contrast of dark and red, reinforcing the same feeling created in the opening shot. In addition to the use of a red filter, a blue filter is also used from time to time, suffusing the screen with a blue wash of melancholy—the tragic result of the conflict between passion and oppression.

At the end of the film, after the woman and all the distillery workers have been killed, we see the father and the son standing in the sorghum field as the sole survivors. At this point, a sudden eclipse is seen in a close shot, symbolically representing the beginning of a new era. Then, as we see the son begin to chant the ballad, the final shot is presented of thick sorghum in the foreground and the red sun far away in the background. At the same time, the ballad continues to be heard over the sound track, inton-

ing a dream about a beautiful future. With the beginning of a new era, the red sun embodies a symbol of hope. Nevertheless, not only is the sun remote but the sorghum in the foreground is so thick that the sun can barely penetrate the dense undergrowth. What a long, arduous way we still have to travel before we attain the beautiful future of the red sun! And will the pious sentiments of the little boy's incantation really bring us any closer to that red sun? In China's current drive toward modernization, it simply cannot afford to ignore the message of *Red Sorghum*.

While the film has achieved international success, it has aroused a serious controversy in China. Almost all the major papers in China have been involved in the dispute. Hundreds of articles and letters about *Red Sorghum* have been published there. Many of them commend the film's great achievement and many others strongly criticize the film because it exposes the backward side of Chinese culture, which they view as an affront to the nation. Even though most people in China have already accepted the idea of modernization, many people still cannot tolerate any negative criticism of China's traditions since they are so deeply rooted in that culture. This strange contradiction is actually a great impediment to China's effort to modernization. At the press conference following the screening of *Red Sorghum* at this year's New York film festival, Wu Tianming, director of the Xian Film Studio, made a brief but powerful statement about the current dispute in China over *Red Sorghum:* A person who does not have the courage to admit his/her shortcomings can hardly make any progress; a nation that does not have the courage to admit its defects is doomed. —ZHANG JIA-XUAN

THE TERRORIZER

Director: Yang Te-ch'ang (Edward Yang). Script: Hsiao Yeh, Yang Te-ch'ang. Producer: Hsiao Yeh. Editor: Liao Ching-sung. Photography: Chang Chan. Golden Harvest (Hong Kong)/Central Motion Picture Corporation (Taiwan)

An issue facing all serious film-makers in Asia is their relationship to the West, its ideas and its cinema. Curiously enough, in striking a balance between their own national cinema and international imports, film-makers who diverge from the already assimilated Hollywood style risk accusations of being too Western and subsequently alienating their audience at home. One of the Asian directors willing to risk marginalization is Taiwan's Yang Te-ch'ang (Edward Yang), who has consistently turned to European cinema for his model to form critiques of specific concern to Taiwanese. In his most recent film, *The Terrorizer* (*Kongbu fenzi*, 1986), Yang experiments with modernist political filmmaking and establishes himself as the most daring innovator of the New Chinese Cinema.[1]

Before considering Yang's film, however, it would be appropriate to explore his national context. Despite being one of the most exciting national cinemas in Asia, virtually nothing has been published in the English-language press about Taiwan.[2] The heritage of Taiwanese film lies in the prewar industry of Shanghai, where most of the old-guard film-makers came from. They migrated to the island with Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, and initiated a shaky industry based on the same genres used in Shanghai. With the formation of the Central Motion Picture Corporation (CMPC) in 1954, the KMT taxed imported films and channeled the money to these Taiwanese producers, a system in place to this day. These films were made by and for immigrants from the mainland, and were characteristically full of nostalgia for precommunist China.

The industry became healthier in the 1960s, following the general trend set by the economy. New genres began to develop, the strongest of which was *ai-ching wen-yi p'ien*: melodramatic tearjerkers based on popular fiction, primarily the novels of Ch'iung Yao. According to Tony Rayns, in the 1970s a gap developed between the film-makers and their audiences; as the mainland genres continued to replicate themselves, they failed to respond to the changing demographics.[3] The younger generation of movie-goers were born and raised in Taiwan and found this formulaic film-making far removed from their social reality.

As the box office began to reflect this problem, the CMPC initiated a series of portmanteau films intended to breathe new life into their stale industry. The first film was called *In Our Time* (*Guangyin de gushi*, 1982), and its four directors were young intellectuals, three of whom had studied cinema at American universities (including Yang Te-ch'ang). The success

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of *In Our Time* led to a CMPC policy of supporting new talent through portmanteau films, giving them a chance to make short, personal films free of commercial pressure. Nearly all of the new directors made the jump to features, and within a year or two were becoming a presence in the Taiwanese industry.

These film-makers, who would soon constitute the New Taiwan Cinema, pursued an alternative brand of film-making; they explored new production modes, switching from postsynchronous to live sound and reconfiguring crew responsibilities. They experimented with television in the ground-breaking series *11 Women* (*11-ko niuzhen*, 1981), and worked collectively, often living in the same house as each pursued his or her individual projects. They developed a realism based primarily on the classical Hollywood style, focusing on women's issues and using dialects other than that spoken in the city of Taipei. For the first time, Taiwanese films directly addressed the problems of contemporary life in Taiwan, attracting a new audience both on and off the island.

While they've never enjoyed a wide release outside of the foreign film-festival circuit, Yang's films have been well received in Europe and the United States, which could have something to do with his relationship to the West, which is far more intimate than that of other Asian film-makers. After obtaining an engineering degree from a Taiwanese university in the late sixties, he left home to study in the United States. By 1972, he received a master's degree in computer science from Florida State University, before spending a year at the University of Southern California film school in 1974. He worked in the computer field for several years, and then returned to Taiwan to begin a career in cinema.

In his first year back home, he shot *Duckweed* (1981), a 2 1/2-hour TV show, and an episode of *11 Women*. His chance to work in features came the following year with a 30-minute segment of *In Our Time* called *Desires* (*Qi-huang*). Yang's first full-blown feature was *That Day, on the Beach* (*Haitan de yitian*, 1983), a lushly photographed film recounting the relationship of two women through a complex structure of flashbacks within flashbacks. His second film, *Taipei Story* (*Qing-mei zhuma*, 1985), describes the world of a woman who must choose between a dead-end future with her fiancé or a new career with a successful businesswoman. His cool, mannerly style in both films drew critical comparisons to Antonioni and Wenders by Western authors and foreshadowed the radical step he'd take in *The Terrorizer*. This style would also be the target of Taiwanese critics, who attacked him for being too indulgently Western.

Yang's relationship with the West is somewhat different than that of other New Taiwan Cinema directors. Formally, he owes everything to European political cinema and nothing to Taiwanese cinema save its slow pace. His characters and themes, however, are extremely specific to Taiwan and the problems it faces in its swift modernization. In *The Terrorizer*, Yang moves one step closer to (Western) modernist political cinema and, at the same time, so specifically addresses the problems of modern Taiwanese society that the Western viewer may have trouble appreciating the range of his critique.

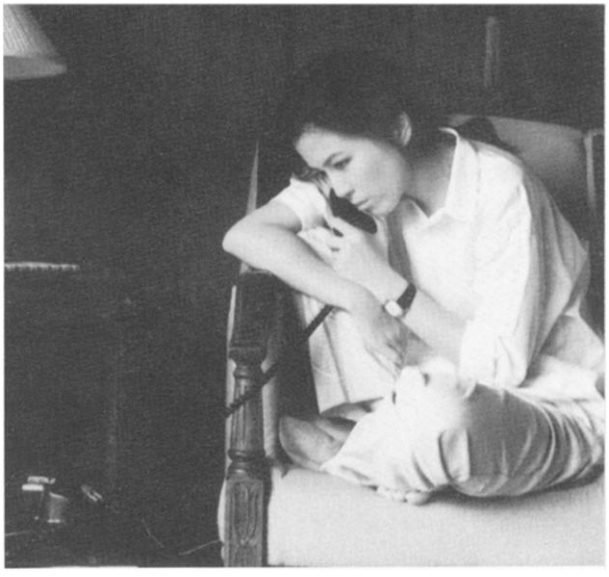
The Terrorizer is a reflexive film which intertwines three main plot strands containing at least ten characters. Yang constructs the film in such a way that the relationships between these characters unfold so slowly that the plot, as it were, remains hidden for most of the film. The first plot strand concerns a young photographer from an upperclass family who becomes obsessed with a Eurasian girl called "the White Chick." She is at the center of the second strand; the daughter of a prostitute and an American GI, she lives a life full of rebellious petty crime. In the main plot thread (primary by virtue of screen time and the film's single sympathetic character), a middleclass novelist, Chou Yü-fen, leaves her career-oriented husband because he can give her neither the love nor the baby she needs. She charts a new course for her life with a new career and an old boyfriend. Amid this diverse collection of characters representing every strata of Taiwanese urban society, the White Chick makes a prank phone call that sets off connections in every direction; the seemingly unrelated stories converge on a violent, terribly curious ending.

The roots of Yang's style reach to directly to Europe and political film after 1968. In a radical break from mainstream Taiwanese film, even that of the New Wave, Yang uses a cool, detached collage style whose intertwining stories initially defy cohesiveness, then intermin-

gle, and finally converge on a double ending. Nearly 20 minutes into the film, a reflexive shot through the viewfinder of the photographer's camera comments on this collage structure. The camera pans back and forth, randomly following pedestrians walking across an elevated walkway: are these characters related or is the director merely shooting whoever walks in front of his camera? Yang playfully cuts to the bored photographer whose camera dangles back and forth from its strap; perhaps it is random. In this game of connect-the-dots, Yang forces a reading of the film by the spectator. He compels his audience to consider the implications of this film by denying them normal cinematic pleasure, and in doing so risks losing both his audience and his career.

So Yang affords the spectator a different kind of pleasure: making the connections. By the end of *The Terrorizer*, Yang ties all the relationships together, some of which remain ambiguous until the final moments of the film. In fact, the shot on the walkway is reprised at this moment of complete convergence when the husband begins his vengeful killing spree: this time, the camera follows the husband (not a random pedestrian) across the catwalk in a straightahead pan. We no longer wonder who these characters are, the connections between them are finally clear. To use Barthes's language, the hermeneutic code is unusually rich in this film; its payoff comes from the resolution of our intial confusion.

This shot of the husband also reveals a further influence of European cinema on Yang in its reflexivity. The pedestrian bridge traverses "movie street" in downtown Taipei. Huge movie billboards spangle the background with color and, more than likely, most of Yang's first-run audience was sitting in one of the dark theaters below. There are many other self-reflexive scenes, including an argument between Chou and her husband in which both directly address the camera. On a more playful note, a delivery boy arrives in one scene with 50 sandwiches for the film crew only to be turned away by one of the characters: "Movies my ass," he mutters. Yang uses the reflexivity to remind the spectators they are watching a film, much the way Chou reminds her husband and lover that her novels are nothing more than fiction. Along with the collage structure, it creates a constant tension between emotional identification with

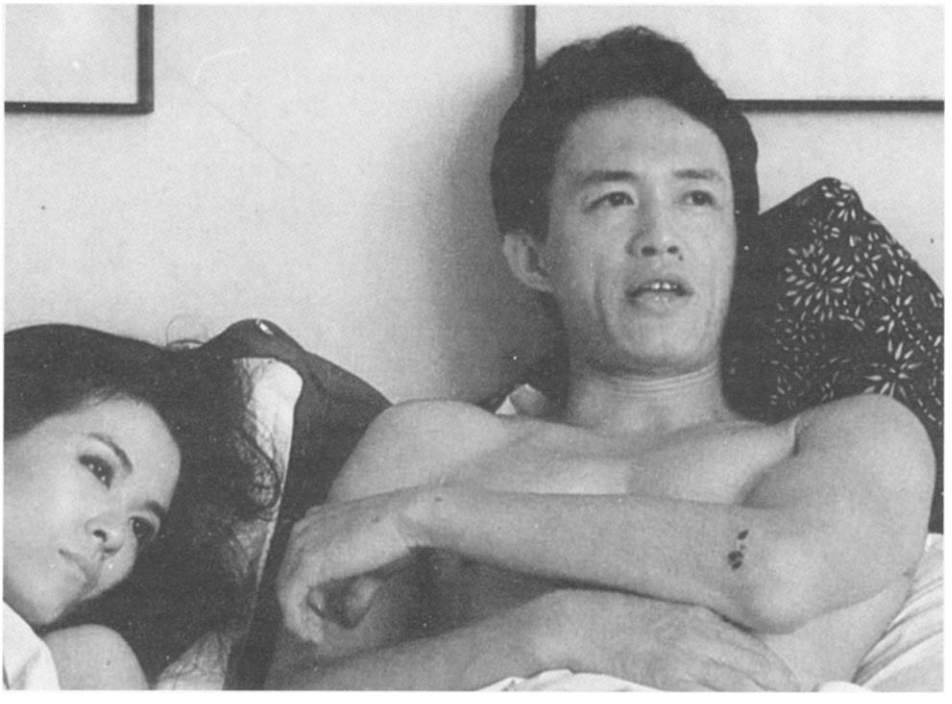


The fatal phone call in THE TERRORIZER

the film and reflexive reminders of its illusive nature.

The distance these two factors create allows for an even more interesting tension between intellectual connections among the collage segments and their perfectly rational explanation in the plot. For example, when the obsessed photographer leaves his girlfriend for the White Chick, he leaves a note saying that he'll never come back. The girlfriend reads it while a female voice-over reads aloud a suicide note. The next shot shows the girlfriend lying in a speeding ambulance as the suicide note continues on the sound track. Finally, Yang reveals the source of the suicidal voice-over by cutting to the White Chick, who's making a prank phone call. We initially assume the suicide note belongs to the girlfriend, then realize it's actually a nasty practical joke by the Eurasian woman she's lost her boyfriend to. Furthermore, it's the White Chick's prank phone call to Chou that initiates the connections which ultimately lead to physical violence. Yang inserts many layers of ironic intellectual connections between the narrative strands which allow him to bury the plot to the degree he has. The process of digging it up is one of active interpretation and, hopefully, self-examination.

Another way Yang forces interpretation is by creating a volatile off-screen space. Between most scenes, and sometimes between shots within a scene, Yang presents an empty frame into which the characters enter. Some of these shots are reminiscent of Ozu's "pillow shots"; the frame contains recognizable objects, but



THE TERRORIZER *by Yang Te-ch'ang*

nothing relating directly to the story.[4] In an interesting variation of this, one transition shows a group of strangers milling around a street corner, creating an abstract pattern of movement. Suddenly, the camera pans with one man as he leaves the crowd and crosses the street, revealing the White Chick, who is apparently soliciting. Often these transition shots are truly empty, even out of focus; they lack signifiers of any kind.

Gimmicky as this sounds, Yang integrates this use of offscreen space neatly into his collage style in two ways. First, the offscreen space becomes capable of unleashing swift and unexpected violence. After training the spectator to expect the narrative to penetrate these empty spaces, Yang uses the accompanying element of surprise—who's going to enter and from where?—to make his scenes of violence all the more shocking. After the transition shot described above, the White Chick takes the man to a hotel where she rifles his wallet. He catches her and pulls out his belt to beat her. The scene is blocked with the man on the left and the White Chick on the right; his eyeline to the right confirms this. As he pulls out his belt, the White Chick suddenly jumps out from the left side of the frame and stabs him. Not only is the unexpected violence surprising, but it comes from *the wrong side* of the frame. One is never sure what waits outside the limits of the camera's vision; it's a breach of trust between film-maker and spectator which Yang exploits fully in the film's violent ending.

Secondly, and more importantly, this creative use of space distances the spectator from easy identification and forces a reading of the film. As spectators scan the abstract patterns of this empty frame, waiting for a character to enter and resume the flow of the narrative, their minds search the offscreen space, wondering whose space it is, who will enter, and from where. At the same time, this forces the spectators to think paradigmatically, making those intellectual leaps between the spaces and narrative strands in spite of themselves. It's quite impossible to avoid an active reading of this film.

Such a reading is necessary, not only for such a decentralized, polycentric structure, but also for Yang's critique of Taiwanese society to hold the possibility of affecting attitudes and stimulating change. The form is entirely European, yet the film's target is culturally specific. Each character represents some facet of Taiwanese life and the film's collage reveals their interconnectedness, how one's selfish actions have repercussions throughout the spheres of family and society. Appropriately enough, Yang was inspired by Reinhard Hauff's concern for society's condition and the German director's dedi-

cation to affecting change through film. Referring to a visit to Hauff during the post-production of *Stammheim* (1986), Yang says, "There may not be Baader-Meinhof groups in this part of the wworld. But the bombs we planted deep within one another are ticking away. There may be something else we could do other than simply hoping they will never go off."[5]

These bombs do go off and the ending is the finest example of how the film both invites and demands interpretation. This genuinely surprising ending diverges wildly from the much more conventional dénouement set up by a controlling narrative, Chou's latest novel. The novel concerns a troubled marriage that ends tragically when a prank phone call leads the husband to suspect his wife of infidelity; the husband in the novel shoots his wife, then himself, in a jealous rage. As Yang slowly reveals the plot of the film, it begins to correspond to the events of Chou's novel. To strengthen the connection, characters who read her novel mistake its events for reality; they begin to act out its movement and she constantly reminds them that it's only a story. At the end of the film, Chou's husband reads the novel and begins a similar shooting spree. In a move reminiscent of Buñuel, Yang suddenly shifts the film back five minutes and presents an entirely different ending in which the husband kills only himself. Neither ending is a dream; rather, it's the natural outcome of the film's structure. By diverging from the controlling narrative of Chou's novel, Yang reminds us that it's only a film.

The characters who mistake Chou's writing for reality are all men, and they assume the roles of their alter egos with fatalistic abandon. Similarly, the spectator takes her writing just as literally, despite her warning that "it's only fiction, don't take it so seriously." The first ending follows our expectations as built up by the controlling narrative of the novel; the second is an indictment of such a passive reading. When the men read her work, they feel plagued by guilt and even explode in violence rather than change their lives. It's the women in the film who are flexible enough to meet the challenges of a fast-changing society and still work towards a meaningful existence. The men play their culturally set roles, unable or unwilling to adapt. It's for this reason that the final image is so compelling. Chou wakes up abruptly with the gunshot that initiates the second ending. After the camera reveals her husband's body lying in a bathroom somewhere in Taipei, she sits up in bed, looking troubled, as if she knew he were dead. Her lover wakes up and asks if anything is wrong (he was murdered in the first ending). She suddenly throws up over the side of the bed in the final image of the film. This powerful intellectual montage suggests she's sick of all the selfish acts of "terrorism" between the characters, but then the mundane explanation sinks in: she's pregnant with the child her husband couldn't give her. Chou teeters on the brink between the old and the new; in a single convulsive action she vomits on the ugliness of the past and signals rebirth and possibility in a most sober sign of hope.

Yang Te-ch'ang also teeters on this edge. A recent poll of nine New Wave directors revealed that only one of them felt "New Taiwan Cinema" was still a valid term.[6] The lone dissenter was Yang Te-ch'ang. The future of their national cinema is as uncertain as ever, and this limbo is, to some extent, what makes Chinese cinema as a whole so fascinating. A place in history for film-makers like Ray, Kurosawa, and Oshima is assured, their contributions unquestionable. It's film-makers like Yang, however, who hold the potential to make Asian cinema in general, and Taiwanese in particular, not only as exciting as Western film, but also as important.

—MARKUS NORNES

NOTES

1. The sloppy transliteration of proper names reflects the lack of standardization, both in Chinese-speaking countries and the English-language press.
2. The sources for this brief history are primarily the author's interview with Fu Syou-ling (colleague of Yang Te-ch'ang), University of Southern California, 18 March 1988; Tony Rayns, "New Cinema in Taiwan," *Hawaii International Film Festival Viewer's Guide* (1987), 60–63; Derek Elley, "Taiwan," *International Film Guide* (1984), 295–298; Ibid., "Taiwan," *International Film Guide* (1988), 328–333; Yvonne Yuan, "New Recipes for the Film Industry: Gourmet Fare for Moviegoers," *Free China Review*, XXXII/10 (Oct. 1982), 48–49.
3. Tony Rayns, "New Cinema in Taiwan," *Hawaii International Film Festival Viewer's Guide* (1987), 61.
4. Various critics have compared Ozu's use of non-narrative space to modernist cinema, which is rather odd considering he's generally considered the most traditionally Japanese director. Yang, on the other hand, is certainly reacting against traditional modes of filmic representation, and directly influenced by modernist film-making. Interestingly enough, in correspondence with the author, Yang attributes his appreciation of offscreen space to rigorous training in Cinese brush painting and calligraphy.
5. *AFI Fest Program Book* (Los Angeles, 1988), 45.
6. Derek Elley, "Taiwan," *International Film Guide* (1988), 333.

Controversy & Correspondence

VIVA VIDEODISK!

Although the credits at the top of Jack Ravage's review of *Night of the Hunter* [*FQ*, Fall 1988] mention the Criterion laserdisk, it is apparent from his article that he is reviewing only the cassette tape version of the film. Since many of his comments relate to the clarity of the sound and visual images, the tape really should have been compared with the laserdisk.

I have viewed the laserdisk *Night of the Hunter* twice in recent weeks, and I think it is one of the very best black-and-white laserdisks ever produced. Although Ravage found the voice track "unduly muddied" on the tape he watched, I found it clear as a bell on disk. Laserdisk sound tracks are, of course, superior to anything available on tape, just as CDs are superior to audio cassettes.

Writing about the visual image, Ravage says: "This is a case in which an excellent projection-video system would probably enhance the ability of the television image to carry its maximum amount of visual information. But one wonders if the limited number of pixels available truly would allow much improvement of the imagery." This statement indicates several misunderstandings about the quality of available television images. What comes out is related to what goes in. If his VHS tape looks bad on a standard set, it will look worse on a projection set. A laserdisk would look much better on either set, because it provides more information to the screen. A standard VHS video tape supplies 240 lines of information to the television screen (no matter what its size). A standard laserdisk supplies about 425. So on any television set, a laserdisk will provide a picture about 60 percent better.

Many people in the film community are still uninformed about laserdisks. They may believe the system has been discontinued, because they confuse it with the obsolete RCA Video Disk technology that played movies with a needle. They may believe not many movies are available on laserdisk (there are about 4,000). They may believe it is priced out of reach (laser players are comparable to high-end VCRs; disks are often cheaper than tapes). They may not be able to find laserdisks where they live (and this is a legitimate complaint, although the user base is now about 700,000 machines, and disks can be mail-ordered).

For serious students of movies who watch them at home, however, laservision is far preferable to videotape. —ROGER EBERT

LASERDISC SOURCES

The following firms offer catalogs, 48-hour delivery, and discounts ranging from 10–15% (many also offer discounts on laserdisc players):

Sight & Sound Laser Discs, Waltham, MA
1 (617) 894-8633 (specialists in Japanese imports)
Ken Crane's, Westminster, CA
1 (800) 624-3078
LaserDisc Hotline, Great Falls, VA
1 (703) 430-8692
Video Dynamics, Chicago, IL
1 (800) 233-DISC
American Laser, 1 (800) 321-2243
The Laser Image, Estes Park, CO
1 (800) 833-2327
US Video Source, Leonia, NJ
1 (800) USA-DISC
Videorama, Burham, IL, 1 (302) 868-2604
Movies Unlimited, Philadelphia, PA
1 (800) 523-0323

A guide to what's available is the *Laser Video Disc Companion,* by Douglas Pratt, published by New York Zeotrope; it reviews 3900 discs with special attention to picture and sound quality. —ED.

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Books

PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEMS OF CLASSICAL FILM THEORY

By Noël Carroll. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988. $29.50.

As his preface explicitly declares, and as the course of the whole of *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* demonstrates, the philosophical framework within which Noël Carroll fashions his critique of classical film theory is primarily that of Anglo-American *analytic* philosophy. To be sure, late discussions in the book draw increasingly on a kind of philosophizing that might be more familiar to film theory, and that might be more the sort of thing that will draw theorists to Carroll's book: namely, *aesthetics*. For example, the final chapter launches an attack on aesthetic essentialism in Victor Perkins (and its reduction of film art to one criterion, coherence) from the point of view of Monroe Beardsley's pluralistic aesthetics where coherence takes its place as one, but only one, of the sources of artistic value (the others being complexity and intensity). But for the most part, Carroll is less concerned to judge *what* various theories say about art than *how* they say it.

In line with analytic traditions, Carroll treats acts of theorizing precisely as acts, in this case linguistic ones that make claims on the world through partterns of argumentation, logic construction, and so on. His own concern, then, is to submit these acts of language to rigorous scrutiny, seeing if they hold up logically and *historically* (I'll return to this). His strategies include: showing the logical ambiguities of a theoretical declaration (for example, the slides in Arnheim from one meaning of "expression" to another as a way of covering over some knotty problems in his formalist position); rendering a seeming logic illogical by taking it to its "logical" conclusion (for example, Carroll suggests how Bazin's invocation of the camera lens as neutral recorder of the world should logically allow him to accept such images as those produced by a swish-pan or a too extreme close-up); and demonstrating the logical inconsistencies that theories of film are so often forced to when new cases of film challenge their essential declarations. For example, as Carroll shows, Bazin's theory falls into confusion when confronted by the fiction film (see, for instance, Bazin on the Western): by its own premises, this theory should ignore the fictional aspects of the film and consequently talk about actors and not their roles, yet Bazinian theory seems easily able to treat fiction films as great myths, modern fables, and so on.

In three chapters devoted to Arnheim, Bazin, and Victor Perkins respectively, Carroll suggests the problems of both those traditions—the realist (Bazin) and the formalist (Arnheim)—by which we have so often imagined our film-theoretical past and through which so many of our own attempts to create a dialectical surpassing of these traditions have operated. (Thus, for example, in Perkins the notion of a symbolism and an expressionism arising "realistically" from the course of the film allows the rendering of the world to seem natural while maintaining the possibility of the artist's formal intervention in that rendering.) In all three cases, including Perkins's more seemingly open theory, Carroll intends to show those moments when a theory of film slips back into closure, an essentialism wherein blanket declarations are intended to act as covering statements for all aspects of film production. And it is in this sense, as I hinted earlier, that Carroll's critique is both logical and historical. What shows up a theory is not only the limits of its logic, but also the inabilities of that logic to deal with new cases, with film experiments that often take as their goal precisely to contravene the limits within which any one theory would hold artistic practice.

"What fails as theory may excel as criticism" (p. 171). This delcaration, which ends the chapter on Bazin, might stand as a motto for the whole of Carroll's venture. Indeed, much of what Carroll suggests in his Bazin chapter is that Bazin's critical discussion of individual films or genres frequently enters into contradiction with the general precepts of his theory but without that contradiction turning unproductive. Quite the contrary, Carroll seems to imagine that writing on film achieves some of its greatest productivity when the specificities of individual experiments call into question the provisions of general theories. It is no accident that Carroll (through the auspices of such maga-

zines as *Millenium Film Journal*) is one of our best critics of avant-garde and experimental films: the contact with films that work at and against the edge of essential definitions of what cinema is allows Carroll the power to pose the open history of film experimentation against the closures of theory. But in this respect, Carroll is not out to invalidate any particular theory (although he does invalidate local premises of the three theorists). Rather, he wants to invalidate the applicability of each theory to anything more than a limited range of film work. Hence, as he carefully shows, Arnheim's theory works best as a theory of silent film (even when Arnheim keeps revising his theory way after the coming of sound) while Bazin's works best as a theory of sound film.

As he has elsewhere, Carroll here refers to his own approach as an "institutional theory of film" (pp. 204–05), and we might take this to imply a number of things. First, as he explicitly suggests, an institutional theory of film (inspired by George Dickie's institutional theory of art) would involve an open rather than a closed logic of production: that is, it would "either incorporate into its definitions or, at least, acknowledge the creativity and search for innovation that is said to be part of the concept of art in general or film art in particular" (p. 204). Second, an institutional theory would work not to determine a universal or eternal meaning or effect or function of a technique. Rather, it would attempt, through criticism of individual works, to show how the instituting of a technique in a particular work grants its meanings or effects or functions that are context-specific. Hence, as Carroll suggests in his critique of Perkins, Perkins so naturalizes what he takes to be "natural" symbolisms that he ignores the possibility that historical developments in audience disposition can make the natural highly unnatural—or even unbearable. In this respect, Carroll returns to Perkins's (in)famous invocations of naturalized expressionism in Ray's *Bigger Than Life* and Preminger's *Carmen Jones* to note how today's audiences (even the supposedly serious film-studies audience) so often find Ray's and Preminger's symbolism "gauche, overblown, obvious, strained, unintelligible, distractingly oxymoronic, outlandish" (p. 239).

The institutional, finally, can refer to all those historically limited, historically determined situations in which films are made, in which film meanings are made through highly specific acts of filmgoing. And here, *Philosophical Problems of Classical Film Theory* might join up with an overall tendency of today's film theorizing to move away from grand declarations to specific analyses (but ones still informed by theory, even if they try to inflect these theories in open ways), to trade essential declarations for historical hypotheses (see, for example, all the new work on theorizing the spectator). I think, for instance, of a whole series of attempts to go beyond Metz's imputation of the quality of an imaginary signifier to the cinematic image *per se*. Just as Carroll does not intend to show classical theories as *wrong* but simply as constrained highly and inevitably in their degree of institutional or situational validity, so too the post-Metzian theorizing finds a certain validity (rather than error) in the notion of an imaginary signifier but (and this is the important point) works to show the limits, historical and institutional, of this validity. And to today's theoretical work, Carroll's book has the added interest of performing a task that this new theory has often eschewed for blanket generalities of its own. While some may regard classical film theory as an unreadable mass of naive essentialism, it has by no means disappeared from the intellectual (or commercial) field, and Carroll has returned to the classical with a patient, detailed reading, showing up the complexities, the aporias, but also the potential productivities, of classical film theory.

—DANA POLAN

THE ACOUSTIC MIRROR

By Kaja Silverman. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988. $12.50 paper.

While crucial work has been done in the last decade to rectify the imbalance in film studies between the attention given to sound and that to image (much of it collected in the two major anthologies on sound—the *Yale French Studies* "Cinema/Sound" and Belton and Weis's *Film Sound*) what had been missing until the publication of *The Acoustic Mirror* was an informed, theoretical, book-length work that uses sound as the formal base for examining the psychological and ideological function of sound in

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cinema. Out of the broad range of possible applications of sound analysis, Silverman brilliantly synthesizes issues of contemporary theoretical concern, focussing specifically on the female voice and how it has been theorized in psychoanalysis. Using films from the forties to the present, she examines the role film sound plays in constructing "woman" in ways that re-enforce psychological as well as ideological assumptions.

Each chapter presents a metacritical analysis of film and psychoanalytic theory, with Silverman submitting Freud, Ernest Jones, Michel Chion, Julia Kristeva, Pascal Bonitzer, and Luce Irigary to a rigorous critical examination, arguing that each is (unconsciously) involved in his or her own process of repression or displacement.

Silverman begins with an entertaining—and persuasive—reading of post-Freudian theories on the formation of the Subject. Citing Lacan as she methodically dismantles the entire Oedipus complex (castration anxiety, recognition of difference, etc.), Silverman identifies the time-worn edifice as a comforting fetish which obscures the *real* "castration"—the splitting of the subject from itself with the accession to language. The mother's (or woman's) much heralded "lack" is transformed into the male subject's terrified projection. His own loss in being torn into Subjectivity, as it were, is constantly reworked as the male subject rewrites the trauma first in terms of his own body (fear of physical loss or actual castration), then as projected onto the woman (as the one who has figuratively suffered castration). She can then be comfortably dismissed in what Freud declares to be the "correct" and inevitable male attitude toward women—contempt. However, the lingering anxiety of what has been repressed demands constant reassurance, supplied in part by the media. Cinema, Silverman states, is "complicit in a general cultural disavowal of *male* lack" (37; my emphasis). This disavowal is reiterated in theoretical works. "The lack which haunts film theory . . . follows a precise trajectory, . . . [one] which proceeds from the loss of the object, to the foreclosed site of production, to the representation of woman as lacking. These orchestrated displacements have as their final goal the articulation of a coherent male subject" (10). Silverman's reading of *Peeping Tom* as a text about the relationship between the "lacking or impaired male subject" and the cinematic apparatus is one of the highlights of the book.)

Sound plays a key role in staving off male anxiety and maintaining that supreme masculine contempt. "Hollywood's sound regime is another mechanism, analogous to suture, whereby the female subject is obliged to bear the double burden of lack—to absorb the male Subject's castration as well as her own" (63). By subordinating "the female voice to the female body" and "aligning woman with diegetic interiority," the figure of the woman in classical cinema is isolated "definitively from the site of textual production" (69)—the extra-diegetic sphere constructed and occupied by the male voice over, the bearer of the gaze, and the Absent Other of Oudart and Dayan's concept of suture. In fact Silverman finds that it is when "the female voice seems to speak most out of the 'reality' of her body, [that] it is in fact most complexly contained within the diegesis" (70–71). As defined by patriarchy, women *are* their bodies, a corporeality insisted upon by synchronization's purported existential linking of body and voice. Yet, as Silverman shows, *control* of her voice is repeatedly wrested from women in Hollywood cinema. In *Kiss Me Deadly* the woman's voice is literally ripped from her body through torture. In films such as *Possessed, Lady in the Dark,* and *Johnny Belinda,* the woman is presented as incapable of articulating her own experience, which must be delivered, interpreted, and delivered by a male doctor/psychiatrist/social worker. In this way classical film asserts male control of the woman's voice physically, psychically, and discursively.

Early feminist films try to break this "natural" voice/body connection. *Journeys from Berlin/71* "abounds with female voices that have no bodily correlative" while the voices in Potter's *The Gold Diggers* "move in and out of synchronization so fluidly as to blur all distinction between diegetic interiority and exteriority, and to redefine the relationship between spectator and spectacle" (142). Silverman's conception of the "voice" however goes beyond sound recording to include concepts of authorship and the crucial issue of woman's relationship to language.

What is lost in the accession to language, this "symbolic castration," is the mother: "What

other object than the mother, either for the girl or for the boy, could initially assume the status of that 'all' which has been sacrificed to meaning?" (122). The "dream of unity" found in *Riddles of the Sphinx* and in Kristeva's concept of the "choric fantasy" presents "a [female] collectivity based not just upon the shared experience of exclusion, and a shared belief in the possibility of both articulating and transforming that experience through new forms of sexual, social, political, and artistic practice, but upon a primary and passionate desire for the mother" (139). It is possible, Silverman argues, for the female subject to maintain her desire for and identification with the mother (through what she calls the "negative Oedipus complex") without sacrificing language. In films such as *3 Women* and *Riddles of the Sphinx,* the (female) child is brought into language/subjectivity through a multi-generational, all-female enclave, one that is deeply threatening to patriarchy yet remains firmly situated within language. Silverman finds that a film such as *Riddles of the Sphinx* "gives the maternal voice such a range of discursive functions as to shatter altogether the fiction of the mother's troubled relation to language" (140).

If there is a major drawback, it is that in the emphasis on written texts the films occasionally get lost. None of Silverman's analyses of specific film texts achieves the depth or mastery of her provocative critiques of theory. Although the shift in the second half of the book to feminist films is necessary and interesting, it suffers from being applicable to a very limited number of films, some of which have been written about extensively elsewhere. (For instance, Kaplan also discusses *Riddles of the Sphinx* in detail in *Women and Film*). The concluding chapter on the work of Italian director Liliana Cavani (whose films, Silverman admits, have "proved quite resistant to other theoretical and critical paradigms" (212) is particularly unpersuasive, dissipating the power of the first half of the book. However, despite these provisos, *The Acoustic Mirror* powerfully interrogates the full range of contemporary psychoanalytic theory upon which much current film theory depends. Within its intense and specialized focus, *The Acoustic Mirror* is likely to become essential to anyone concerned with sound, feminism, and other issues of contemporary film studies. —AMY LAWRENCE

FILMS FOR WOMEN

Edited by Charlotte Brunsdon. London: British Film Institute. US distributor: University of Illinois Press, 1986. $13.95.

In this collection of feminist articles which discuss individual films rather than theories of women and representation, Brunsdon has two basic goals. First, while she is not claiming "representativeness" for the collection as a history of the debates in feminist film criticism, Brunsdon does want to portray many of the diverse and even contradictory feminist approaches to film that have developed over the years. (The articles were mostly published between 1978 and 1983.) In this regard *Films for Women* is a modest, though useful, effort. Brunsdon chose articles that are accessible to nonspecialists, avoiding the highly academic language of current psychoanalytic and/or semiotic criticism. As desirable as this is, such a strategy risks avoiding, rather than confronting, an important aspect of the history of feminist film criticism. Highly specialized theoretical vocabularies have arisen, in part, in response to such questions as who is the recipient of a filmic address, and how, in both a formal and a historic sense, is such an address constructed? Brundson is aware of the significance of these issues, and indeed her second and more interesting goal is to focus on "women as an audience *for,* rather than producers of [or images *in*] films."

Thus the articles in this collection all discuss films which, either because of the films themselves, or because of the way they were marketed, seem to address women as their audience. The section on documentary films includes B. Ruby Rich's provocative essay on *Not a Love Story* as well as discussions of *Self-Health, Daughter Rite,* and *Song of the Shirt.* The longest section in the book, "Fictions," puts together articles on a mixture of feature-length and short films which have female protagonists, or are concerned with the problem of constructing a female narrative—e.g., *Jeanne Dielman, A Question of Silence, Burning an Illusion, Marianne and Juliane.* The section on Hollywood considers what Annette Kuhn calls "new women's cinema," and includes articles on such films as *Julia, Girlfriends, Coma, Mahogany* and *Personal Best.* In introducing the final section on exhibition and distribution, Brunsdon notes that the questions raised in the early parts

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of the book—"what does/should a feminist film look like," become transformed when one pays attention to the ways particular audiences have the power to construct their own meanings in a film. The articles in this section, then, discuss debates about women-only viewings, the politics of distributing and exhibiting women's films, etc. An important inclusion is the "Notes" from the Black Women and Representation Workshop which address black women and, as Brundson says, throw "into relief the unmarked 'white heterosexual' which so often preceded the word 'women' in Film Studies."

The notion of gendered address in film is an issue of significant debate in current feminist criticism. Brunsdon's admittedly "loose" use of the notion allows her to point to the way issues of audience have been addressed in very different situations. However, most of the articles do not directly engage the arguments about audience. There are a few exceptions—Jeanette Murphy's discussion of *A Question of Silence* is clearly about the way that film self-consciously refuses to address men. But most of the essays in *Films for Women* are what Brunsdon calls them—feminist "readings." The issues that are raised by Brunsdon's organizing question in this anthology—what does it mean to say a film is *for* women—cannot be adequately considered until we begin the process of putting together theories of female subjectivity with ethnographically informed studies of the historically specific way films (and genres) address particular audiences, and the way audiences respond to those films within the social determinations of production. Brunsdon's collection provides an interesting and provocative incentive to begin this project. —KATHLEEN MORAN

THE FILMS OF RENE CLAIR

By R C Dale. Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987.

This comprehensive two-volume study of a major but currently somewhat neglected filmmaker is a work that every university film program should have in its library. Particularly in its documentary aspects, it is a model of the scrupulously detailed scholarly resource for serious work in film studies and film history. These two volumes are the fruit of work that Dale began over twenty years ago, and the result is very nearly in the same league with Donald Richie's book on Kurosawa, Alexander Sesonske's on Renoir, David Bordwell's on Dreyer, etc. Though its critical range is somewhat limited, Dale's study matches these others in thoroughness and sympathetic mastery of a full career if film-making. As such, it is a major English-language resource on the subject of René Clair, though not the definitive critical analysis—a feat which it only partly begins to attempt. Dale has had copious access to Clair's papers and to Clair himself; all of Clair's films are discussed in extensive detail; and other aspects of Clair's career, including especially his writing, are surveyed and examined.

Volume I is subtitled "Exposition and Analysis" and it consists of 32 chapters, one for each of Clair's films, separated by brief biographical/historical interchapters (labelled "dissolves" by Dale). The chapters are organized chronologically and are divided into four sections: Silent Films, Early Sound Films, English-Language Films, and Later French Films. While Volume I focuses on "film-by-film formal critical appreciation of Clair's work," Volume II is subtitled "Documentation" and it centers on "complete descriptions of every film Clair made," in the form of painstakingly detailed "breakdowns" which "attempt to reconstruct the original release versions and to point out major deviations . . . that have come to disfigure almost half of them." In addition to these breakdowns, Volume II includes excerpts from Clair's early writing (two poems and some early critical writing), "An Essay on Rhythm" by Clair, a summary of *Adams* (Clair's novel), "Clair on Labiche," "First Draft of 'A Comic *Intolerance*,'" summaries of the literary sources for *La Beauté du Diable* and *Porte des Lilas,* excerpts from Clair's "Introduction to *Tout L'Or du Monde,*" and Clair's "Académie Française Reception Speech"—all, of course, in English translation.

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to find fault with the very respectable edition which Scarecrow Press has produced here). As a publishing endeavor, however, Dale's study has a kind of split identity—with Volume I serving mostly as a critical biography and Volume II as a very large appendix whose lavishly detailed breakdowns tend to intersect with and overwhelm the summaries that are also part of Volume I. But apart from questions of length, it is easy enough to see that if this book had appeared at an earlier stage of the mid-century explosion of academic interest in film studies, it would have had a more conspicuous reception as a model of scholarly thoroughness in detailing the nature of a major director's work and career.

From the vantage point of the late 1980s, those scholarly virtues still apply, and yet one is also necessarily aware that Dale's approach to film criticism is strongly rooted in the kind of critical analysis that held sway in the hey-day of *auteur* criticsm but has since given way to greater emphasis on social and political theory and a theory-based criticism. In this respect, Dale is closer to Richie than to Sesonske and Bordwell in the above-mentioned examples, but Dale's Volume I unavoidably has the partially dated quality of a lengthy scholarly work begun in one phase of film-critical history and finished and published in another. Indeed, it seems significant that Dale does very little with other critics' analyses (apart from his surveys of the initial reception given each film by contemporary reviewers), and that he rarely cites any other critical reflection on Clair unless it comes from a book on Clair or from Clair himself.

In his Introduction, Dale declares, "I leave to others the task of applying psychological, semiological, structuralist, Freudian, or whatever methodology they might find enlightening" to Clair's films, and Dale's own approach focuses on examination of "the underlying motion-generated dynamics of Clair's work," an approach that is certainly relevant to any well-centered discussion of Clair. But while Dale is especially good on the formal brilliance of Clair, the author's discussions might have profited from confrontation with some of the recent analyses and reconsiderations of Clair's work. Allen Thiher, for example, leans toward the more specialized methodologies cited by Dale, and yet his view of Clair parallels Dale's while couching itself in a richer intellectual perspective ("Clair's best work is essentially a mechanical ballet that combines both a surrealist rejection of codified systems and a classical understanding of farce"). Similarly, Dale's observations might have been sharpened by explicit contact with Stephen Philip Kramer's discussion of Clair as "a cultural conservative" who is "ill at ease in modern society" and "ambivalent about film," or with Celia McGerr's approach to Clair's "little world" with its "composed reality" and disdain for conventional film realism.*

Some of the limitations of Dale's critical commentaries have to do with the terms of analysis. In a much-discussed sequence in *Le Million,* for example, two lovers are juxtaposed with two singers pretending to be lovers on an opera set viewed from an illusion-disrupting perspective. Celia McGerr, in her excellent but much briefer study of Clair, writes of this sequence as one that shows "not that life and art imitate each other, but that life uses art to create something better than either—the magic of love." Dale writes of the same sequence as one that "virtually destroys any inclination . . . to believe in the existence of objective reality" and "insists that subjectivity is the only reality that has any meaning." McGerr and Dale share a keenly detailed awareness of nuance in Clair's films, but Dale's conclusions tend to be more general and abstract, while McGerr's tend to have greater immediacy and emotional force. On Dale's behalf, however, it should be noted that the sympathy and detachment in his analyses mirror the masterly modernist intellect that is implicitly central to his critical portrait of Clair as *auteur.*

Dale's emphases, which might be labelled "formalist/humanist," remain especially appropriate with a director like Clair, however, and his modestly academic prose and unflagging attention to detail are among the book's virtues. Nevertheless, it is ironic that, for all his knowledge and sympathy for Clair's work, Dale makes a weaker case for Clair than he might have. Over the long haul of this career study, Dale's

*Celia McGerr, *René Clair,* Boston: Twayne, 1980; Allen Thiher, *The Cinematic Muse,* Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1979, 64-77; Stephen Allen Kramer, "René Clair: Situation and Sensibility in *A Nous la Liberté,*" *Literature/Film Quarterly,* Vol. 12, No. 2, 1984, 142-144; John Russell Taylor, "René Clair" (Richard Roud, ed., *Cinema: A Critical Dictionary,* Vol. 1, New York: Viking, 1980, 213-220); David Thomson, A Biographical Dictionary of Film, New York: Morrow, 1981 (2nd ed.), 101-102.

auteurist pursuit of continuities in the director's work has a certain inadvertent tendency to confirm the general impression of Clair as a lightweight, a brilliant technician, a very intelligent comic-ironist with a narrow range. Dale's reverence for *A Nous La Liberté,* a "textbook classic" which is usually defended in terms which risk crucial distraction from what is most vital in Clair's work, may also play a role in these limitations. (For me, the complex, unconquerable lightness of *Entr'acte, The Italian Straw Hat, Sous les Toits de Paris, Le Million,* and *Quattorze Juillet* are the heart of the matter, and all that is needed to secure Clair's place as a major film-maker and masterly miniaturist.)

And it may be that Dale's auteurist methodology leaves him somewhat boxed-in on the subject of post-WWII Clair—"motion-generated dynamics," after all, is a livelier issue in the first half of Clair's career than in the second. Fuller encounter with latter-day revaluations of the post-WWII-films (by John Russell Taylor and David Thomson, for example) might have complicated Dale's approach in rewarding ways. That is, had he been able to work with a wider range of theses and of interpretative perspectives, he might have been able to make a stronger case not only for the later films but for Clair's total achievement as an *auteur* as well. But then Dale may also have been moved toward analytic modesty by the imposing presence of Clair's precise and self-assured commentaries on his own work. Extended quotations from interviews and Clair's own writing loom very large in this book (and form one of its distinctly valuable assets), but perhaps the *auteurist* found it difficult to step beyond the shadow of the *auteur.* —PETER HOGUE

SEX, CLASS AND REALISM
British Cinema, 1956-1963

By John Hill. London: British Film Institute; US distributor, University of Illinois Press, 1987. $25.95 cloth, $15.95 paper.

This important book is by no means just one more survey of "film and society." John Hill's concern is to demythologize; his more finite if more slippery terrain is that of film and ideology. The conclusions he draws are even-handed enough: the "new" British cinema of the late fifties and early sixties was not *as* new as its avatars, busy as these were congratulating themselves on their originality, were fond of claiming—with nervous glances over the shoulder at the French *nouvelle vague.* The films that make up Hill's corpus (particularly the Woodfall films associated with Tony Richardson, *Look Back in Anger, The Entertainer, Saturday Night and Sunday Morning, A Taste of Honey, The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner*) "occupy an ambivalent space. While they undoubtedly assisted in 'opening up' the British cinema with their innovatory contents and more socially enquiring attitudes, they were, in the end, something less than radical. This can partly be attributed to the debt which they owed to the 'Angry Young Men' "—all the above Woodfall films, and many others, had self-conscious literary sources—"and, to a lesser extent [their debt to] the New Left." While it's easy enough to score points against the former—John Osborne's loathsome misogyny should surely have been apparent all along, and the Angries' shift to the Right seems predictable in retrospect—one of the fascinating features of Hill's account is his keen eye for the unexpected ideological convergence of the Angries and the Lefties in some of the films of the British new wave. Bitter enemies have more in common than either wishes to believe. "Respect for the traditional working class and hostility to the corruptions of modern mass culture are not opposed but part of one and the same response to the economic and cultural developments of the 1950s." The Angries' real target, as Hill reminds us, was not capitalism or class divisions but superficiality, and the cure for superficiality is, of course, a change in (individual, moral) attitude, not political action or social change. To a remarkable extent, this kind of targeting carried over into the films of the new wave, in which the individual is the agent of causality, and the origins and explanations of actions and events stem from individual psychology rather than social, economic, and political relations. This is why the problems these films investigate are problems that can be resolved. If their causes can be located in the individual, there is no need for any reconstruction of the social order. Nor is there any need seriously to challenge sexual arrangements. The "new" British cinema consistently identified superficiality ("crass consumerism") with wo-

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men. (Simone Signoret, the exception proving the rule, may have outmatched the strong female characters of the American *film noir* but remained very much the outsider in Jack Clayton's *Room at the Top.*) British new wave films concentrated on their characters' personal and interpersonal lives not at work (which is often rendered invisible or seen as a mere backdrop) but at leisure. Women, as metaphors for affluence, were commonly "desired not for themselves but for the economic advantages they represented." Female characters eligible for marriage are there in order to help male characters move up the social ladder, but are invariably less exciting than those who are destined to be unavailable for matrimony. Male characters were the centerpieces, coming to terms and making compromises with the social order; female characters were abandoned "to the confinement of familiar domestic and marital roles" and were summarily punished if they strayed outside these boundaries. In this way sexual choice was raised as a possibility—and this in itself seemed liberating to anyone who was (like me) a British teenager at the time—but it was raised in the service of accommodation and conformity.

Hill is at his shrewdest and canniest in explaining the ideological mechanisms of this conformism. The much-celebrated "realism" of the British new wave was in fact a self-conscious foregrounding of artistry over actuality. Tony Richardson's gifted director of photography, Walter Lassally, was (perhaps surprisingly) quite explicit about how the kind of location shooting that became his trade-mark made the subject-matter of the typical Richardson film not the action of the characters but the shot itself. As Hill puts it, "rather than place providing the setting for narratively significant action, it is insignificant action that provides the pretext for a visual display of place." (Cf. Roland Barthes: "It is the category of reality and not its contingent contents that is signified . . . the loss of the signified becomes the very signifier of 'realism.' ") Once the signification of reality becomes the site of authorial enunciation in this way, as it surely did in these films, their "tendency to reduce social relations to individual characteristics" is reinforced. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*'s workplace sequences, the difference between Arthur (Albert Finney) and those around him who have been "ground down" is accounted for not with reference to *why* they have been reduced in this way (predatory capital, alienating labor) but simply with reference to Arthur's personal characteristics. He is smarter than they are, that's all.

These films literally couldn't see the forest for the trees. Instead of reasserting the continuing gap between capital and labor, they explored some selected conditions of working-class life in the face of the new affluence and consumerism. "As with the New Left . . . many of the economic changes wrought by 'affluence' were taken for granted; it was the value of their moral and cultural effects that was open to question. Politically, this tended to lead to a representation of the working class as largely inert and conformist; it is only individual members of the class who are able to rise above or rebel against this general condition. Industrial action and organized political activity are absent and, by implication, increasingly redundant." We are as a moral, not a social category, but also with the notorious "end of ideology" ideology. John Hill, whose eye is much less jaundiced than the directorial eye of the British new wave, has put us in his debt for unmasking it.

—PAUL THOMAS

SPANISH FILM UNDER FRANCO

By Virginia Higginbotham. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1988. $20.00 cloth, $9.95 paper.

Virginia Higginbotham's *Spanish Film Under Franco* is much narrower in focus than either of the other two recent books on Spanish cinema —Peter Besas's *Behind the Spanish Lens: Spanish Cinema under Fascism and Democracy* (1985) and John Hopewell's *Out of the Past: Spanish Cinema after Franco* (1986). Despite their deceptive titles, these are both really general histories of Spanish cinema over the last sixty years. While Hopewell provides us with insightful capsule analyses of a wide range of films, and Besas weaves an intriguing anecdotal history of the Spanish film industry, given the scope of their enterprises neither author was able to do more than suggest some of the critical issues related to the nature of film and national

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culture in Spain. For that reason the prospect of a book which promises to focus exclusively on the theme of film under fascism seems a welcome contribution to film scholarship.

In her preface Higginbotham leads us to believe that indeed that is her intention. As she says, she wants to explore the aesthetic of a politicized national cinema, to ". . . analyze film both as a national art form and as a form of national discourse on prominent social and political issues' (viii). Later, she speaks in more specific terms of "the film language of the opposition, designed to demystify and conceal as well as to reveal," and of "a movement of opposition film-makers who never lost sight of its purpose of undermining rather than placating a hostile fascist regime" (96).

The time is indeed at hand for the kind of detailed, analytic view of Spanish film which goes beyond the broader historical overviews and tackles the issues of film and cultural style in the way Noël Burch does in his approach to Japanese film in *To the Distant Observer.* There is a wealth of evidence to support Higginbotham's claim of a rigorous visual and cultural style to Spanish cinema during the Franco dictatorship. The 1941 national exaltation, *Raza,* scripted by Franco himself under a pseudonym, failed to stimulate a genre of national epic films; yet in the absence of an explicit series of censorial norms, that film's ideological and narrative clichés served as an unwritten code of representation for film-makers over the next twenty years. As the embodiment of the Francoist esthetic in film-making, *Raza* also seems to have served a number of opposition directors in the final decades of the dictatorship as an antithetical model, the intertext through which to deconstruct the mythology of the imaginary Spain invented by the regime both in cinematic and social discourses in the early 1940s.

Because this is both an intriguing and an important theme, our disappointment over Higginbotham's failure to carry out her proposed project in the book that follows that suggestive preface is all the greater. The eleven chapters which comprise *Film Under Franco* bear little resemblance to the announced project of a close scrutiny of the aesthetic and stylistic development of film under the dictatorship. Instead, Higginbotham presents what is at best a more schematic, less insightful variation of the film history we find in Besas and Hopewell. She devotes one chapter to a skeletal history of film in the three decades preceding the Civil War and to a more thorough discussion of the operation and effects of film censorship from 1939 to 1975; a series of chapters deal with the major figures of opposition cinema: Juan Antonio Bardem, Luis Garcia Berlanga, and Carlos Saura. Included in this part of the book is a brief chapter, more by way of an extended note, on the influence of Buñuel on Spanish film-makers, and a catch-all chapter devoted to "Other Important Directors." The book concludes with chapters on the transition from dictatorship to democracy and a final overview on what Higginbotham sees as Franco's legacy in film.

While some of these chapters do address the issue of film style, a disproportionate amount of space, easily half of the slim 137 pages, is taken up with plot summaries of major films. Judging from Higginbotham's prefatory comments, she was unaware of Hopewell's book when *Spanish Film under Franco* went to press. Unavoidably, this led her to duplicate materials presented with far greater clarity and insight in *Out of the Past.* But it is more than simply a question of bad timing that weakens *Spanish Film under Franco.* Higginbotham consistently fails to realize the complexity of the developments she discusses and thereby creates for the uninformed reader a skewed picture of her subject matter.

What she calls the *estetica franquista* or "Francoist esthetic," is a misleading term which seems more appropriate as a label for the official cinematic style of the forties films which glorified the ideals of patriotism, Catholicism, and family, than of the subtle style of works which run from the early fifties to Franco's death in 1975. Nor does she really tell us anything new or significant about that official style against which younger film-makers, recently graduated from the National Film School in the early 1950s, began to rebel. She devotes only two paragraphs to *Raza* but doesn't discuss the film's pretensions of epic style, its glorification of the family, or its distorted appropriation of Spanish history. These are, in fact, the elements of a ponderous official style and ideology of film which, without much difficulty, could be read insightfully into some of the key films of Bardem, Berlanga, and Saura. But Higginbotham precludes that possibility by passing over the question of that official style.

In her recounting of Spanish film history she takes little note of the interaction among various opposition film-makers of the post-1960 period and thus ignores the important role played by the producer Elias Querejeta—mentor of a number of key figures in the development of an anti-Francoist film aesthetic, directors like Manuel Gutierrez Aragon, Jaime Chavarri, Victor Erice, and Ricardo Franco, all of whom made their first films under Querejeta. It is, in fact, the conceptual style of Querejeta's productions, only a part of which are Saura films, which accounts for the apparent volume of innovative opposition works in the last years of the dictatorship.

Higginbotham's emphasis on an auteuristic organization of film history makes it hard for her to appreciate the coincidences and cross-fertilization of ideas among certain film-makers. The one notable exception to this is her comparison between Ricardo Franco's *Pascual Duarte* and Jose Luis Borau's *Furtivos,* a discussion which reveals her ability to make illuminating links not only between films but between film and other cultural texts. Yet finally, the scarcity of such discussions only reminds us of the schematic nature of so much of the rest of the book.

By far the most crucial of the factors which undermine *Film under Franco* is the simplistic approach to the problematic of history in relation to Spanish cinema. I am not only referring to the book's idiosyncratic chapter groupings ("Early Postwar Films: 1939–1959"; "Late Postwar Films: 1960–1975") but to the tendency throughout, but especially in the latter portions, to reduce the Spaniard's always problematic relation to history and historical consciousness to a mere chronological schema. For Higginbotham, Spanish history is a series of clearly distinguished periods and styles; and historical cinema is similarly an easily recognizable genre of historical reconstruction. This is obviously what leads her to conclude: "The films already made after Franco's death make clear that the history of Spain's Civil War, including questions of social progress and political ideology, remains only tentatively examined in Spanish cinema" (134). "Until the Spanish film industry can reawaken to its past, the most compelling attempt at a truly national cinema remains, ironically, the films of the late *franquista* period. Saura, Fons, Ricardo Franco and Borau have a sense of national urgency that seems to have faded as filmmakers adjust to their new freedom" (136).

Though obviously inaccurate as a reflection of the interest of film-makers in the war theme and its relation to the idea of a Spanish nation (see Chavarri's *A un Dios desconocido* (1977) and *La bicicletas son para el verano* (1984); Gutierrez Aragon's *Corazon del bosque* (1979) and *Demonios en el jardin* (1983), Saura's *Dulces horas* (1982), and Berlanga's *La vaquilla* (1985), all of which are listed in Higginbotham's appendix but forgotten in the context of her remarks), such an observation suggests a very narrow reading of the past as to mean only the Civil War, ignoring entirely the fact that for most Spaniards it was the postwar years during which the really devastating effects of the Franco victory touched their lives and reshaped their outlook.

History as a discipline as well as an idea was debased by Francoism; it was merely the propaganda tool of the state, and most pointedly so in terms of the film industry. It may well be for that reason that the depiction of history in film, even after the dictatorship, has been rooted in subjective personal memories. It is finally in that conflation of national and personal history where Spanish film after Franco has chosen to confront and exorcize its past. A film like Chavarri's *El desencanto,* while not dealing explicitly with the war, hits the essence of what the war meant in the Spanish consciousness in ways that go beyond the literal definition of a historical film.

The real problem with *Spanish Film under Franco* is that it either ignores or else suppresses these admittedly problematic issues and opts for a less troublesome but also less interesting notion of what Spanish film really is.

—MARVIN D'LUGO

TWENTY-FIVE BLACK AFRICAN FILM-MAKERS

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Two of the directors included in Françoise Pfaff's *Twenty-five Black African Film-makers,* Paulin Soumanou Vieyra and Ababa-

car Samb, passed away before the book was released. Vieyra was to African cinema what Langlois and Bazin were to French cinema. A film-maker himself, he was also the architect and the defender of Africa's cinema at festivals and film conferences. The first African graduate of the French *Institut des hautes études cinématographiques* (IDHEC), Vieyra and *Le groupe africain du cinéma* in the colonial epoch denounced the Laval decree which banned African film-making in the colonies lest it turn into a subversive activity. They asked Jean Rouch and Marcel Griaule, their Africanist friends and teachers, to act on their behalf in order to convince the Over-Seas minister to lift the ban. As Pfaff points out, Vieyra singlehandedly traced the history of African cinema through such journals and newspapers as *Présence Africaine, Le Soleil* (Dakar), and *Le Monde* (Paris), and his pioneering books: *Le cinéma et l'Afrique* (1969), *Sembene Ousmane Cinéaste* (1972), *Le cinéma africain* (1975), and *Le cinéma au Sénégal* (1983), "all of which provide invaluable first-hand information." Vieyra is also listed as the producer of Sembene's feature films. Ababacar Samb, too, leaves behind *Kodou* (1971), the first African feature to depict traditional ways of dealing with insanity in Africa, and *Jom* (1981, distributed by New Yorker Films), in which the griot (traditional artist and story teller) is used as the master and model for African film language. Pfaff inherits an error from one of her bibliographical sources when she states that Samb "belongs to a second generation of Senegalese film-makers." His first short film, *Et la neige n'était plus* (1965) puts him in the first generation with Sembene, Moustapha Alassane, Timité Bassori, Oumarou Ganda, and Vieyra, all of whom are included in the book as pioneer film-makers. Samb will also be remembered for his role as former secretary of the African Filmmakers Federation (FEPACI), and as former actor in the 1950s in the *Compagnie d'Art Dramatique des Griots* which he created in Paris with Timité Bassori and Sarah Maldoror—who, like Med Hondo and Haile Gerima, moved from theater to cinema. For Samb, as for his colleagues who went from theater to film, it was impossible to express what he really felt in Greek tragedies and modern Western plays, and to put it in Bassori's words, "I had become aware of the limitations of theater. And as an African stage actor in France I also had very little opportunity to find work." Nonetheless, Samb and his friends learned lessons from the stage which they took with them to film; as Maldoror, who has adapted several books on film, puts it, the theater "experience was most fruitful because one must know about acting and theater rules in order to make films."

Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers is an important contribution to film scholarship on the ground alone that, like the gest of the griot, it has recorded the positions of Vieyra and Samb, and thus retrieved them from forgetfulness and ignorance. Pfaff, the modern griotte, is also to be applauded for remembering and including in the text of African cinema Oumarou Ganda (1935–1981), actor in Jean Rouch's *Moi un noir* (1959—a classic of the New Wave and *cinéma vérité*), and author of *Cabascado* (1968—where the Other stands up and speaks about his life, his needs and the signification of his culture to himself). Of the film-makers that Africa mourns, only Jean-Michel Tchikoussou (1942–1988, from the People's Republic of Congo) is missing from Pfaff's book.

The question of inclusion and exclusion is bound to be more important among the living film-makers. Pfaff anticipates an answer when she states that "*Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers* is designed to serve as a tool to explore further the realm of African film. Rather than presenting a comprehensive survey of all the talented Black African directors (253 filmmakers from Sub-Saharan Africa and Madagascar are listed in 'cinémas noirs d'Afrique'), it highlights a selected group of representative cinéastes whose works have both significantly enriched African filmmaking and received substantial international exposure." However, Lionel Ngakane, Ngnoan Mbala, Sega Coulibably, King Ampah, Moussa Kemoko Diakité, to cite only these, might be proposed by another list as equally significant and deserving to be included in the book. One might complicate the issue by raising the difficulty of defining the unity of African cinema due to the increasing number of directors and the diversity of themes and motifs. The problem is compounded by national concerns which are different from country to country, the politics of production, as well as censorship. But, since Pfaff's concern is to con-

stitute "a source of information that sheds much needed light and attention upon a too often neglected area of film studies," it is fair to see her book, not as a definitive work, but as an important first step toward several volumes of the kind.

Each chapter of Pfaff's book is divided in five parts: "Biography," "Major Themes," "Survey of Criticism," "Filmography" and "Bibliography." This traditional study of "l'auteur et son oeuvre" which Pfaff inherits from the French links the directors' lives to their films. In the "Biography" sections, for example, Pfaff describe the ethnic background of the directors, their religion, education, and the influence of oral literature on their narrative styles. For Pfaff, to appreciate the bounds between the villagers, and the mixing of fiction and documentary in *Peasant Letter* by Safi Faye, one of the most important women directors in Africa, it is important to know that she has been "nurtured by the tales of a rich oral tradition" and that her experience with Rouch as an actress in *Petit à petit* (1968) and a student in ethnography influenced her film language.

Pfaff also discusses the cost of production of the films, stylistic features, and the languages used in them. The book reveals that film-makers in Cameroon, Ghana, and to a lesser extent Niger, Nigeria, and the Ivory Coast, prefer to use French or English in their films, arguing that it is the best way to reach wider audiences. Daniel Kamwa defends the use of French in his films by stating that "in order to please myself, I could make my actors speak Bamiléké, but only 20% of Cameroon's population speaks that language, and I want my films to reach as large an audience as possible." Other filmmakers, including Sembene and Souleymane Cissé, use African languages because they consider the language question as ideological and part of their narrative styles. Emphasizing the political and artistic effects of film over its commercial effect, they use African languages along with other aspects of the oral tradition not only to create the "real effect," but also to create a film style that is singularly African.

The "Theme" and "Criticism" sections of the chapters contain plot summaries and the reception of the films by critics. Drawing from sources as varied as *Cahiers du Cinéma, Sidwaya* (Ouagadougou), and *Variety,* Pfaff discusses the reception of the major themes and aesthetics of each director's films. Her impressive chapter bibliographies include entries from newspapers, magazines, and specialized journals from Africa, Europe and America, filling a gap for students who wish to write term papers on African cinema. *Twenty-five Black African Filmmakers* reveals, indeed, to film scholars that African cinema constitutes an important area of film studies that can no longer be ignored. —MANTHIA DIAWARA

MARGUERITE DURAS

San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1988. $9.95 paper.

This is one in a stream of Durassian works that has swollen from a trickle to a respectable flow in recent years, especially since the major success of *The Lover* in 1985. This volume (labelled *Duras By Duras* on its cover) consolidates writings by and about Duras from an important period of her career, one deeply inscribed in French political and literary history. The original 1975 French publication *Marguerite Duras* included the shooting script for the first half of *India Song* and the dialogue for the second, and notes, interviews and critical essays on the film and its precursor *La Femme du Gange* (1972), as well as on the novels *The Ravishing of Lol V. Stein* (Fr. 1974) and *Destroy, She Said* (Fr. 1969). A second edition of the book in 1979 added the author's notes and interviews on *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976), *Baxter, Vera Baxter* (1976), and *Le camion* (1977), and it is this version here reproduced in English.

The primary material in the book is invaluable. The secondary essays are worth reading, but their poetic rather than analytical approaches will mainly satisfy diehard Duras devotees. Lacan applies his theory of vision split between the gaze and the image to the triangulation of love and watching in *Le ravissement.* The Blanchot piece on *Détruire, dit-elle* exudes the aftermath of May 68. The most informative essays are by Dionys Mascolo and Benoît Jacquot, primarily because these two work closely with Duras: Mascolo was her second husband, Jacquot was assistant director on *India Song.* Other essays make several important parallel points on the conventions at work

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in a Durassian text, but finally one tires of what even Duras calls the "semiotic jargon" (121). "Marxist semiology has become a phallocratic terror." In Duras's own mouth or from her own pen, the ways that her works re-question and re-manifest (yes, and re-present) relationships between narrative and representation, between sound and image, of power, of desire, take on concrete meaning. By comparison, the theory seems pale. Lacan himself refers to Duras as the artist, who—Freud says—"always precedes . . . paves the way for" the analyst's work (124).

Duras speaks about her narratives as if they were true, as if she knows the people intimately. Yet when describing her works in formal terms, as representations rather than as narratives, Duras makes clear that her intention is to destroy the representation of the narrative by subverting it or refusing it in the scenic realization, to a degree not previously thought possible, as her admirers contest. ". . . I'm going toward a sort of No Man's Land of cinema where there will no longer be any correlation between sound and image, toward a kind of dislocated cinematic time." (88) In *India Song,* the many voices that speak of and around the narrative of Anne-Marie Stretter never issue from perceivable mouths, bodies of actors representing characters. Even when we see the characters and hear their voices simultaneously, the actors never mouth the words; the shifting temporalities of sound and image never correspond. In *Son nom de Venise,* the image's representational relation to this same sound track is further reduced, to an almost abstract visual referential: the abandoned, ravaged Rothschild mansion.

This destruction of the correlation between sound and image derives in part from the fact that Duras, like Mascolo, deplores the loss of the magic of the silent cinema. In an interview conducted just after *India Song* was finished, she said "There is something in silent films that has been lost forever. There's something vulgar, trivial in the phenomenon of sound . . . the inevitable realism of sound . . . and the trickery it represents." (75) Many have written about this in recent years, most notably Chion. Paradoxically, the silence of the seen characters in *India Song* reaffirms the allure of the two-dimensional image, even as Duras's voices destroy its hegemony, both through denying it the narrative (in *Son nom*), and by fragmenting the voices into a "plurality" of "orchestrated" sound (and meaning).

The ultimate destruction of representation is the withholding of the narrative from the spectator. Ravaged by time, by memory, by distorted fragments of visual and audio information, the story represented (for there still definitely is one) is rendered nearly incomprehensible as mythos, as events. Yet it is not representation itself that Duras seeks to unseat, but what she might call the lie of representation, which she equates with the lies and pretense of politics, the inherent abuse of power. The punctures in Duras's representations openly acknowledge this lie. In *Le camion,* Duras and Gerard Depardieu sit and read a story about an old woman and a truck driver who picks her up hitchhiking. Thus *Le camion* refuses to represent its own story, except through words. The film sharpens this refusal by whetting our appetite for the narrative through cut-in images of and from a truck, and through the figures of Duras and especially the star Depardieu.

In her notes on *Le camion,* Duras speaks of the doom of the cinema and of politics in one breath: the cinematic image, in fixing the representation, "impedes the text, strikes down its progeny—the imaginary," unlike the written text, with its "illimitable proliferation of images." The cinema is doomed, Duras warns, because the spectator knows that the cinematic product is "tied up in millions, bastardized, polluted by the very conditions of its manufacture." Just as actors lay claim to the truth of their role, politicos "all have the ideal solution, they're the saviors, the perfect guardians of what I call the political solution." "The political lie is apparent everywhere; why shouldn't the journalistic and cinematographic lie be denounced in the same way?" Thus Duras, a former Communist Party member, a resistance activist, veteran of May '68, claims that the only way to fight against power is not to act in terms of power but to perform free acts, such as *Le camion,* which she declares to be "an act against all power."

Marguerite Duras is a welcome addition to our understanding of recent experimentation in film-making. The book should prove of interest not only to Durassian scholars, but equally to theoreticians and practitioners, particularly as it documents the juxtaposition of text, perfor-

mance, and visual/aural media that comprises this woman's contribution to modern cinema.

—MARY KAY MARTIN

THE UNTUTORED EYE
Childhood in the Films of Cocteau, Cornell and Brakhage

By Marjorie Keller. Rutherford, Madison, Teaneck: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986.

Despite its title, Marjorie Keller's book is not about "the untutored eye" (as I will explain below), but it most definitely is about "childhood in the films of Cocteau, Cornell and Brakhage." It is a thematic study sturdily buttressed by close readings of specific films, by relevant biographical material, and by fruitful, if highly selective, use of ideas about childhood drawn from sources as various as Freud, Piaget, Bettelheim, Emerson, Empson, and Baudelaire. Keller's goal—to demonstrate "the uniqueness of each film-maker *and* his contribution to the formulation of childhood in film"—is ably accomplished. Her writing is clear, her argument coherent, and despite the limited number of film-makers discussed, her study makes an important contribution to the slowly growing body of critical work on avant-garde film.

"The untutored eye," as Stan Brakhage uses the term in *Metaphors on Vision,* is intended to evoke the most immediate and unmediated experience of visual perception. Its purest form, Brakhage believes, is in what an infant sees while still unaffected by logic, language, or other conventions through which society codifies and communicates its knowledge of the world. In proposing that film might capture or re-create "untutored" vision, Brakhage was entering into a discourse on art and perception that goes back through the French Impressionist painters and John Ruskin to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century associationist psychology where it was held that infants see only a mysterious world of intermingling colors, textures, and shadowy, insubstantial shapes without fixed spatial relationships. Although E. H. Gombrich has argued that an un-learned or "innocent" vision is a logical and perceptual impossibility, for Brakhage the "untutored eye" represents a primal experience of seeing the world as if for the first time.

This is not, however, Keller's line of argument. She is not interested in children's perception, but in adult perception of childhood, and her book shows what we can learn about Cocteau, Cornell, and Brakhage from the way they look at children. Her approach is psychological, inflected much more toward the psychoanalytic than the perceptual side of psychology.

Keller makes much of Cocteau's "repressed fixation on his dead father." From Freud on Leonardo and Karl Abraham on Giovanni Segantini, she draws support for her investigation of Cocteau's "narcissism and homosexuality," and her goal is to interpret sequences of Cocteau's films as "obsessive reinactments of psychological realities present since early childhood." Concentrating on *Blood of a Poet, Orpheus,* and *Beauty and the Beast,* Keller succeeds quite well in elucidating her double theory about Cocteau and childhood: that for Cocteau children are justifiably and admirably antisocial, and that they are also the "paradigm of his notions of the artist/poet."

In the case of Cornell, Keller concentrates on his "massively repressed" sexuality. She applies to Cornell a "symbolic equation" worked out by the psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel in an article on the symbolic equivalence of "girl" and "penis." In the same vein, she draws analogies between Cornell's and Lewis Carroll's obsessions with prepubescent girls, and she finds more psychoanalytic ammunition in Cornell's "fixation on androgynous females." With the help of Fenichel and Freud, Keller is able to bring out "the underlying sexual content" of seven of Cornell's films, from *Centuries of June* to the unfinished *Vaudeville DeLuxe.* As Freud sexualized the nursery, so Keller makes manifest the sexual content of a childhood world Cornell seems to have regarded as the epitome of innocence.

Brakhage, as Keller rightly stresses, is much more Freudian than Cornellian in his view of childhood, and his response to children is more analytical than either Cocteau's or Cornell's. Consequently, there is little in the way of repressed psychosexual implications to be exposed in Brakhage's rendering of childhood. Keller sets a different task for herself, which is to trace the changes in Brakhage's vision of childhood during the more than 30 years of his film-making career. Keller chooses to treat only a few of Brakhage's many films, beginning with *Antici-*

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pation of the Night, where the "untutored" vision of childhood is celebrated at the same time that it is shown to be doomed by the encroachment of society's ways of seeing, and ending with *Murder Psalm,* where the child's world seems to be completely at the mercy of social and natural forces of destruction. As Keller traces the path of Brakhage's increasingly pessimistic perceptions of childhood (she also gives close attention to *Songs IV* and *IX* and *The Weir-Falcon Saga*), she is able to highlight some of the ways Brakhage's autobiographical concerns and his ambitions as an artist merge with his presentation of childhood.

In fact, that combination of concerns guides Keller's treatment of all three artists and makes her book much more valuable than a simple thematic study would be. It is, finally, a treatise on the creative process through which Cocteau, Cornell and Brakhage use images and ideas of childhood to, in Keller's words, "reinvent themselves as artists."

—WILLIAM C. WEES

BRITISH FILM HISTORY: TWO VOLUMES

PIONEERS OF THE BRITISH FILM, by John Barnes. London: Bishopsgate Press, 1988 (despite copyright of 1983). Available from IFBF Inc., 5602 N.E. Hassalo Street, Portland, OR 97213; $35.00 postpaid.

THE BRITISH FILM CATALOGUE, 1985-1985, by Denis Gifford. London: David & Charles, 1987. Available from Facts on File, 460 Park Avenue South, New York NY 10016; $75.00 postpaid.

Barnes's volume, the third in what is to be a series of five, is perhaps the most interesting so far. Covering the events of 1898, Barnes finds a sudden rise in the production of story films in proportion to actualities and travel subjects. This is the year James Williamson starts producing filmed anecdotes, and the very titles of his 1898 films show him to be studying the output of Lumière, Smith, and Paul with close attention. Barnes's chapter on exhibition contains a few surprises. There is a perceptible drop in music hall exhibition (an interesting contrast with growing vaudeville exhibition in the US) while traveling showmen and the fairground show come into prominence; the sheer variety of the modes of exhibition for this year is astonishing. It includes such novelties as a peepshow device which can accommodate 12 customers at a time viewing a small projected picture. There is also an interesting chapter on Edison's British agents Maguire & Baucus (including Charles Urban), who this year transform themselves into the Warwick Trading Company, and who will later cut their ties with the US and become British businessmen—an alert piece of opportunism arguably justified by an American market kept sluggish by Edison's suspicious vigilance. The chapter on apparatus shows that progress continues to be made in solving the problems of flicker and of the unsteady and/or vibrating picture.

Gifford's update and revision of the *British Film Catalogue* is something better than perfect: it is all we have. In effect a filmography of the British cinema, the book will be useful to US students since its sources are unavailable in US libraries, including the Library of Congress. Besides information on the recent decades, it is our chief source of data on early British cinema, which in recent years has emerged as probably the most important body of film prior to D. W. Griffith's debut. And it is the only published source on the films of Lewin Fitzhamon, who with *Rescued by Rover* (1905) and his subsequent films made the breakthrough to cinematic editing. —MARTIN SOPOCY

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION, 9/30/88

Title: **Film Quarterly.** Frequency: Quarterly. Four issues published annually. Subscription price: $14.00 individuals, $28.00 institutions. Location of office of publication: 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, Alameda County, CA 94720. Headquarters of publishers: Same. Publisher: University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720. Editor: Ernest Callenbach, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Owner: The Regents of the University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. The purpose, function and non-profit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during preceding 12 months.

Extent and nature of circulation:	Av. no. copies each issue preceding 12 months	Actual no. copies of single issue pub. nearest to filing date
A. Total no. copies printed	7228	7200
B. Paid circulation:		
1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors and counter sales	3301	3251
2. Mail subscriptions	3394	3396
C. Total paid circulation	6695	6647
D. Free distribution	103	100
E. Total Distribution	6798	6747
F. Copies not distributed	430	430
G. Total	7228	7200

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PIONEERS OF THE BRITISH FILM, by John Barnes. London: Bishopsgate Press, 1988 (despite copyright of 1983). Available from IFBF Inc., 5602 N.E. Hassalo Street, Portland, OR 97213; $35.00 postpaid.

THE BRITISH FILM CATALOGUE, 1985-1985, by Denis Gifford. London: David & Charles, 1987. Available from Facts on File, 460 Park Avenue South, New York NY 10016; $75.00 postpaid.

Barnes's volume, the third in what is to be a series of five, is perhaps the most interesting so far. Covering the events of 1898, Barnes finds a sudden rise in the production of story films in proportion to actualities and travel subjects. This is the year James Williamson starts producing filmed anecdotes, and the very titles of his 1898 films show him to be studying the output of Lumière, Smith, and Paul with close attention. Barnes's chapter on exhibition contains a few surprises. There is a perceptible drop in music hall exhibition (an interesting contrast with growing vaudeville exhibition in the US) while traveling showmen and the fairground show come into prominence; the sheer variety of the modes of exhibition for this year is astonishing. It includes such novelties as a peepshow device which can accommodate 12 customers at a time viewing a small projected picture. There is also an interesting chapter on Edison's British agents Maguire & Baucus (including Charles Urban), who this year transform themselves into the Warwick Trading Company, and who will later cut their ties with the US and become British businessmen—an alert piece of opportunism arguably justified by an American market kept sluggish by Edison's suspicious vigilance. The chapter on apparatus shows that progress continues to be made in solving the problems of flicker and of the unsteady and/or vibrating picture.

Gifford's update and revision of the *British Film Catalogue* is something better than perfect: it is all we have. In effect a filmography of the British cinema, the book will be useful to US students since its sources are unavailable in US libraries, including the Library of Congress. Besides information on the recent decades, it is our chief source of data on early British cinema, which in recent years has emerged as probably the most important body of film prior to D. W. Griffith's debut. And it is the only published source on the films of Lewin Fitzhamon, who with *Rescued by Rover* (1905) and his subsequent films made the breakthrough to cinematic editing. —MARTIN SOPOCY

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Title: **Film Quarterly.** Frequency: Quarterly. Four issues published annually. Subscription price: $14.00 individuals, $28.00 institutions. Location of office of publication: 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, Alameda County, CA 94720. Headquarters of publishers: Same. Publisher: University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, CA 94720. Editor: Ernest Callenbach, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA 94720. Owner: The Regents of the University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720. The purpose, function and non-profit status of this organization and the exempt status for Federal income tax purposes have not changed during preceding 12 months.

Extent and nature of circulation:	Av. no. copies each issue preceding 12 months	Actual no. copies of single issue pub. nearest to filing date
A. Total no. copies printed	7228	7200
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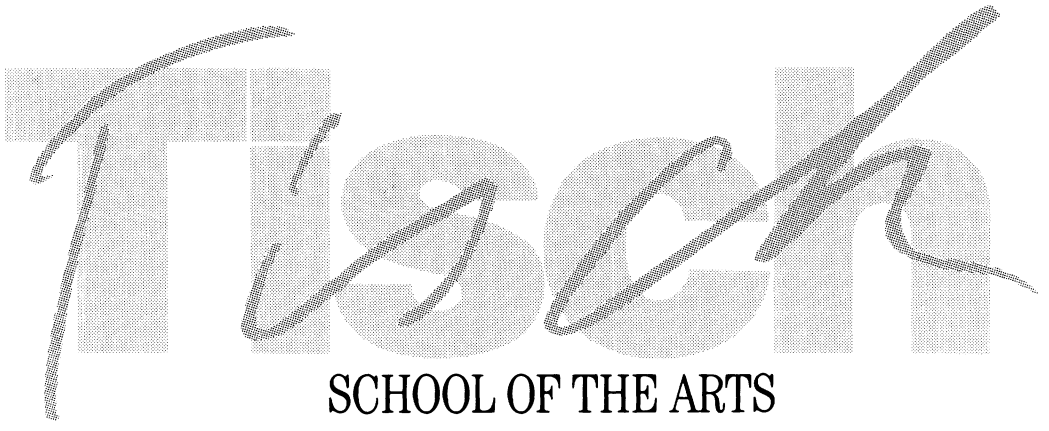

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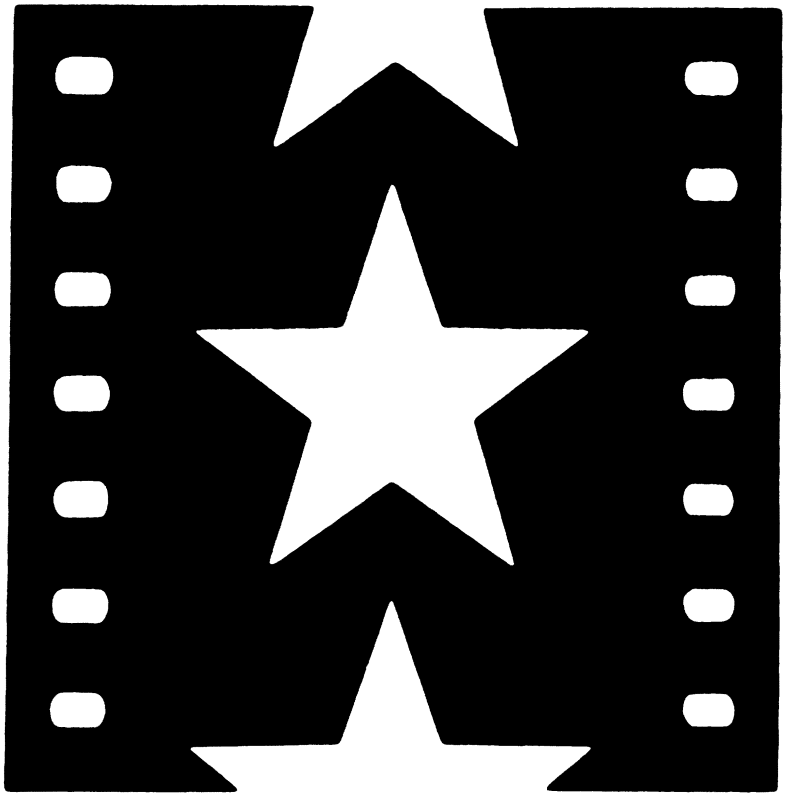

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